Dying to be funny : the sociological significance of (un)successful live performance humour.

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Abstract

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Carl Barton

This thesis is a study of the success and failure of performers who aim to earn a living from intentionally making people in a live audience laugh. A fundamental aim of the study is to establish the sociological significance of live performance humour as social practice. Hence the emphasis of the research is to demonstrate the influence of non-performance and performance factors in the production of (un)successful live performance humour, rather than the influence of psychological factors that relate to positive (laughter) or negative responses of individual subjects to humorous stimuli contained within a performer's joking material. The study will show (un)successful live performance humour to be determined by the complexity of component factors involved in the construction of a social context for live performance humour. The thesis develops a definition of social context that refers specifically to venue settings rather than everyday social situations, which allows individuals participating in it to identify themselves as either a live performer of humour, or a member of a live audience to a live performance of humour. The social context of a venue setting is established on the interaction between; a 'live' audience as a social group (rather than a collection of individuals receiving humorous stimuli); a live performance in proximity to a live audience; and individual physical and social factors that exist within the physical and social environments of a venue setting. The sociological significance of (un)successful live performance humour is put forward on the basis of research which utilises macro- and micro-levels of analysis to show success or failure to be dependent upon more than the competence of performers - it is to show that the social context for live performance humour is a determining influence in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

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Declaration:

None of the material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in the University of Durham or any other university. None of the material contained in the thesis is based on joint research.

Statement of Copyright:

For my mother and father,
Pen and Steph and Tilly

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Introduction

As both the subject and the aim of this thesis are directly attributable to the research carried out for my Master of Arts degree, a brief outline of that earlier work is considered helpful to show clearly what this research is about and why it is being done. The Master's thesis is an ethnographic study of regional identity as represented through a particular cultural practice; namely, the work of professional comedians in the working men's clubs of the North-East of England. The field research was aimed at gathering data to address issues such as the existence of a North-East regional (Geordie) humour, the exploitation of 'regionalism' in performance and the reaffirmation of regional imagery by social practice. It involved open interviews with professional comedians, members of working men's club audiences, club entertainment secretaries and booking agents. The interviews were conducted in conjunction with participant observations of audiences and comedians working in working men's clubs throughout the region. While the methods were used specifically to meet the stated aims of the research, they did produce data that posited fundamental questions that could not be fully examined within the parameters of the thesis. The questions that were found to be the most demanding of further investigation could all be traced back to the single issue of the precariousness of the live performance of humour: Why does a skilled professional comedian's successful performance routine, that is tried and tested in terms of content material and style of delivery, always carry the potential to fail - even in the same venue setting? The dogmatic testament of all of the professional comedians I interviewed insisted that such failure would inevitably happen to 'any comic' at some time in their careers and that occasional failure was to be accepted as a certain fact of life for a comedian. It was a fact they sought to establish by identifying what they considered to be particular causes of failure, such as the culture of working men's clubs devaluing performers, performers having to compete with other forms of entertainment such as drinking, raffles and bingo, or the 'poor condition' of an audience (as inattentive to a performance). They

argued that these causes could be empirically validated with their own experiential authority and that the research I was doing would provide further evidence to support their axiomatic explanation of performance failure. Indeed, the research did provide empirical support for this explanation, but it did not allow for the anomalies and fundamentally pervasive questions it raised to be developed into a thorough critical analysis of that explanation. In order to address these questions and to understand why they were not initially considered to be central issues to an explanation of performance failure in the Master's thesis, it is necessary to expand more fully on that research. The provision of this additional detail will also show why these questions form the basis of a separate thesis that will address them as central issues in the production of (un)successful live performance of humour.

The support that the Master's thesis provided for the professional comedians' preferred explanation of there being specific and identifiable causes to a performance failure, developed from two central axes of the research: the professional status of the performer and the empirical emphasis of the research. With regard to the professional status of the performer, the working definition of professionalism was based upon the acquired competence of an individual to apply learning and requisite skills, to earn a living as a successfully funny performer to different audiences of strangers. Acceptance of this definition of professionalism was supported by the established reputations of the comedians that featured centrally in the research as highly successful performers working regularly in the clubs in the North-East of England. It was also confirmed by my own critical appreciation of their competence from having watched every one of them perform successfully in working men's clubs in the region. However, working with this definition had the effect of diverting attention away from a thorough critical scrutiny of each particular performance of each performer who failed. When I did watch a comedian fail my procured acceptance of their underlying professional competence made me look elsewhere for an explanation of the cause of that failure. I accepted that something must have happened to prevent the competent professional comedian I had seen before from being

successful and that the research I was doing would show what it was. In order to explain how the research was allowed to settle within these parameters of analysis of performance failure, two aspects of the performance of a comedian must be appreciated: first is the uniquely direct and high premium of performance success between performer and audience and secondly, the correspondingly equally direct cost of failure between audience and performer.

Live performances, like those of comedians, that are essentially devised for the sole purpose of making people in an audience laugh, are the most direct form of live performance in terms of their demonstrable success or failure. This is because the level of appreciation of the performance is physically communicated directly to the performer by the audible response of laughter from the people watching it. The proximity of the audience to the live performance and the interactive relationship between the two, means that each performance is judged immediately and explicitly by the people watching it. Any other kind of live performance, such as an actor in a play, a musician in a band, or a dancer in a company, does not have an audience that can normatively show its unequivocal critical appreciation with such immediacy and directness during the course of the performance. While it is accepted that a singer or a band may be booed off stage in some settings, these performers have the advantage of performing an art form that is more tolerant of audience inattention than live performance humour (Cook, 1994; Wareham, 1994). A poor performance of music offers the performer a greater opportunity to continue their performance in the background to a highly inattentive audience, whereas a comedian in a comparable situation cannot continue. Such a level of inattention substantially undermines the performance of a comedian, as the success of these performances is dependent upon the active listening and viewing of members of an audience, as each individual must engage in the construction of the conceptual mechanisms involved in the production of humour in order to appreciate it (Zijderveld, 1983; Mulkay, 1988; Palmer, 1994). Therefore, apart from the discernible level of the enthusiasm of the applause at the end of a performance, an audience to a non comic performance does not have the same conventionally acceptable

opportunities to communicate the level of success of a performance during the performance. Indeed, the level of success those performances achieve may depend more on the published reviews of professional critics who write from a position of power to impose their opinions. Such reviews may be more or less determining of the success of a performance, based on the strength of the reputation of the critic, or the reputation of the publication in which the review appears. While comedians are also subject to reviews, the primary determinant of the palpable success or failure of a comedian's performance is the amount of laughter from an audience.

The directness and immediacy of the response of laughter creates a high premium of unmistakable success as a reward to a comic performer who is able to stimulate the pleasure of laughter in individual members of an audience. Conversely there is a correspondingly high cost of failure for the comic performer who is not able to fulfil these desirable expectations of pleasure in an audience. The high cost of failure refers to the unmitigated obviousness of performance failure that is exhibited when a performer simply cannot do what they are being paid to do and make an audience laugh. Without the frequent and consistent punctuation of a performance with laughter, the comedian does not have recourse to any of the available means afforded to non-comic performers to salve their professional ego. The actor, for example, may blame the script; the dancer the choreographer; the musician the arrangement; or each may feel that others involved in the performance have let them down. These performers can ameliorate failure even further by using strategies that can offset the directness of the impact of failure upon themselves. They can, for example, perceive a reviewing critic to hold a personal grudge against them, or believe a reviewer to be more inclined to establish their own career building reputation as a ruthlessly discerning and celebrated critic. They can even take solace from the conventionalised applause of an audience at the end of performance. The professional comedian, however, does not have the facility to develop such strategies that utilise secondary considerations to protect their professional ego, instead they are told directly and unequivocally by their non laughing audience

during the performance, that they have failed and that they must take personal and professional responsibility for it. It is this personalised aspect of failure that emerged as a significant factor to the unanimity exhibited by the comedians I interviewed as to the existence of specific causes to performance failure.

To be a member of an audience in a working men's club watching a professional comedian 'die' on stage, is one of the most uncomfortable social experiences I have ever encountered. This discomfort is undoubtedly due in part to the manner in which the characteristic directness of the different forms of behaviour used by working men's club audiences to communicate dissatisfaction, effectively personalise performance failure. One form is for audience members to show that they are obviously ignoring the comedian. They are able to do this because unlike a traditional theatre, with fixed rows of seats all facing the stage which physically focuses audience attention on the performance, the organisation of seating around tables in a working men's club, allows audience members to turn away from the stage and start talking to friends during the performance. This effectively ostracises the comedian from the audience as a social group and unless the performer is able to win them back, the level of inattention exhibited by a working men's club audience can degenerate to a point where the performer has no choice but to leave the stage ignominiously. A more pro-active form of personalising the failure of a comedian in a working men's club is for audience members to shout out comments that are intended to be sharply critical of the performance. Again, the setting of the club was found to be more conducive to this form of behaviour that other venue settings such as theatre. However, such comments are not restricted to the quality of a performance in terms the content of the joking material or the style of presentation; they are more usually personally abusive to the comedian. This can be seen clearly in the way the physical characteristics of an individual performer are routinely incorporated into such comments to add explicit personal insult to the shouted criticisms of a performance. I have not heard anyone shout out to a comedian in a working men's club that the joking material of the performance was poorly scripted, or that the comic timing or style of performance was perhaps more suited to

experimental theatre, but I have heard many variations of 'get off you useless fat/ugly bastard'.

The field work for the Master's thesis showed that if members of a working men's club audience are deprived of the pleasure of being made to laugh by a comedian, they are extremely well positioned to openly show their disappointment. The comedian who is judged to be a failure is inescapably and unsympathetically condemned by the audience to be a prominent spectacle of personal and professional failure. The perceptible personal effect of the obvious and callous disregard shown by club audiences to a failing comedian did play a part in convincing me to accept their argument - that given the high costs of failure they would inevitably have to endure, no comedian would allow their performance to fail if there was any way they could possibly avoid it. In other words, the research accepted that there were specific causes for a performance going wrong that are beyond the immediate control of a professionally competent comedian.

There is, therefore, a basic performance success/failure dichotomy in the Master's thesis which holds that the success of a performance is determined by the competence of a comedian and that failure is the result of specific causes that are beyond the performer's control. This dichotomy is problematic. To accept that it is the competence of the performer that determines the success of a performance, is to logically accept that failure is either the result of performer incompetence, which is ultimately within the bounds of their control, or something else they cannot control. Given that the professional comedians would not accept performative incompetence as a common cause of failure, then something beyond their control had to be put in place to account for their readily espoused fact of occasional failure. Yet the statements they used most frequently to indicate probable causes of failure did raise fundamental questions as to what a cause of failure could be that was completely independent of the performer. For example, when they spoke of the 'poor condition' of an undisciplined and inattentive audience, they would claim to have had no chance to succeed in such

circumstances and therefore evade any charge of incompetence. However, when the comedians spoke of their ability to 'handle different audiences' as a basic definition of their professional competence, they inadvertently admitted that not being able to 'handle' a particular audience is essentially a cause of performance failure. This suggests that there is not a simple and clear cut separation of the competence of a performer from what were identified as specific causes to performance failure that were deemed to be beyond the performer's control. At what point does the inattention of an audience become a cause of failure that is beyond the control of a competent comedian, or, instead, represent the failure of a comedian whose performance is simply not good enough to prevent the audience becoming inattentive?

The starting point for this thesis is to reject the performance success/failure dichotomy put forward in the Master's thesis. The aim of this thesis is to show that the success of live performance humour cannot be determined exclusively by the consummate skills of a performer; and that competence is only one of many factors contributing to the success of a performance. Further, this thesis does not accept the status of a single non-performance factor to be a definite cause of performance failure and will, therefore, aim to demonstrate the determining influence of numerous and variable permutations of non-performance factors to each (un)successful performance. These factors will be shown to relate to different parts of the complete social context of a live performance of humour, such as the physical and social structures of the setting in which a performance takes place, the occasion of a performance and the constituent condition of an audience. In short, the aim of this thesis is to establish the complete range of significant performance and non-performance factors involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour.

The stated aim of the thesis identifies the subject of the study as live performance humour. This title is used to refer to the work of men and women who aim to earn a living from being paid to give performances that are intended to be funny to an audience of strangers in actual physical proximity to the

performance. It is a subject title that is designed to encompass a greater range and diversity of performances than the definitive use of the term comedian would allow, yet still specify the subject of the thesis as a particular form of humorous performance. The first three chapters of the thesis are given to provide a cumulatively precise definition of the form. Chapter one will explain why the subject of the thesis cannot be titled simply as the work of professional comedians. It will show that the work of a comedian is defined in terms of a verbally based joke-telling performance and that not all performers who assume responsibility for their performances to be judged as successful or not on the single criterion of their funniness to a simple audience,[1] either tell jokes or are verbally based. The subject of the thesis is not restricted to the study of one particular type of performance, and chapter one will show that the use of the term comedian in the title would indicate that it is. In short, chapter one will provide an initial illustration of the extent of the range of performances to be included in the research. It will do this in order to contribute to the substantiation of the title of live performance humour as an accurate definition of the particular form of intentionally funny live performance that is the subject of the thesis.

Chapter two will establish a typology of performances contained within the subject form of live performance humour, as a system of classifying performances is an essential organisational requirement of the thesis given the large number and wide variety of performances in the form. The typology separates the form into three distinct 'types' of performance based upon a thematic structure that is characteristic of the performances located within it. The type categories are to be called, 'mainstream', 'circuit' and 'extreme' and are intended to be used throughout the thesis as an initial point of reference that can provide outline descriptive detail for any named performance in the research. Further, because of the large number of performances in the form, each type is to function as a sampling frame. As it is practically unfeasible to give a description of every performance in the form, a selection of performances will be detailed as a representative sample of each type. With a sample of performances from each

type the combined sample is designed to demonstrate the full range of performances in the form. Chapter two will, therefore, refine the introduction given in chapter one to the expansive nature of the form of live performance humour and give a clear indication of the range and diversity of the performances the form includes.

Chapter three completes the definition of the form of humour being studied by demonstrating the essential character of live performance humour in terms of the actual performances it encompasses. The chapter will develop the typology introduced in chapter two to allow for each performance to be allocated to a specific position within a type, which is determined by the level of typicality of the performance to the type. For example, some circuit type performances share distinct characteristics with some mainstream type performances. These performances will be positioned accordingly within the circuit type and given a specific number and letter reference code to indicate their position and, therefore, their basic performance characteristics as warranted by such a position. The reference code assigned to the location of a performance within a type is intended to enable a performance to be appreciated in terms of the concomitant detail associated with a specific type location. Examples of representative performances from each reference coded position within each of the three types, will be given to allow for a wide variety of named performances to be used as reference examples throughout the thesis, without a detailed description of each having to be written every time the name of the performer is used. For example, a reference to Alan Fox as a MT1 performer, affords the reader the assurance of knowing that a descriptive definition of his work is available from simply checking his MT1 reference code in chapter three. By using detailed descriptions of actual performances taken from field work observation, the definition of a performance that has been allocated to a type code is to be used as the definitive account of a particular reference example. The system of codification is, therefore, put forward as a substantive source of reference to the reader, rather than the name reference example of a performance. This is because the performance of a named performer may

change over time. Performer X may be an extreme type performance, but because of the financial inducements of working on television, for example, may change to a mainstream type (Wagg in Paton, Powell, and Wagg (eds.) (1996) pp.321-44). Hence, there is a high potential for confusion that stems from three basic shortcomings associated with using only the name of a performance to provide a substantive reference example. The first is that the reference assumes the reader is familiar with the work of performer X. The second is that the reference assumes the reader is familiar with the work of performer X at a particular time in the performer's career. The third is that the reader does not have to remember the detail of each individually named performance, or have to endure the inconvenience of continually having to search through the thesis to find the detail of performance X that has been referred to by name only. So to refer to performer X as a MT3E performer gives a clear indication of what kind of performance is being referred to in the study. The system of type coding performances is therefore aimed to reduce the potential for confusion from the use of numerous examples of performances that the thesis demands and provide the necessary substantive reference detail for a comprehensive, clear and precise definition of live performance humour as the subject of the thesis.

Chapters four and five illustrate the influence of non-performance factors on the success of live performance humour. Chapter four concentrates on venue setting as a particular social situation in which a performance takes place. It will show a venue setting to contain a range of non-performance factors that combine to form a social context that significantly affects the success or failure of a performance. The social context of a venue setting will be shown to have two main component factors: environment and social structure. Environment refers to the actual setting and involves both physical and social elements. Social structure relates to the social rules, norms and relationships that are inherent in the organisation of the setting. Eight different kinds of venue setting will be used to provide comparative detail to illustrate differences in social and physical factors that combine to constitute the particular social context of a venue setting.

Chapter five is an examination of the influence of audience on the production of (un)successful live performance humour. The starting point is to establish a definition of a 'live' audience for 'live' performance humour. To do this a comparison is made with a 'non-live' audience, for television for example, in order to highlight specific characteristics of a live audience. Reference to chapter four will be used to show that audiences for live performance humour vary from one venue setting to another. For example, some venue settings are characterised by disciplined, passive, attentive audiences, while others are renowned for their undisciplined, active and potentially debilitating audiences to live performance humour. The chapter examines the interactive role of the audience with performance and explains how the relationship between audience and performance is a vital determinant to the success of live performance humour.

Chapter six uses extended field work in the venue setting of working men's clubs to provide a specific example of the influence of social context on the success of live performance humour. The example will illustrate the effect of social context in the construction of an audience, and demonstrate the influence of the audience on live performance humour. The chapter will, therefore, give empirical support to the work in chapters four and five and this will be put forward as an established substantive base to address the stated aim of the thesis: that the success of live performance humour is not determined solely by the competence of a performer and that failure of a performance is not determined solely by a specific and identifiable cause.

As the concluding chapter, chapter seven addresses the aim of the thesis directly by developing the proposition that if the level of success of a performance is determined by a particular combination of performance and non-performance factors, then a particular combination of factors could produce an inordinately high level of success for a performance. The chapter will show that such a combination of factors can exist and will detail the work of a professional stand-up performer as an example of this occurring. The example is used to confirm

the aim of the thesis by showing that the basic proposition of the research does translate into practice; and that an extraordinarily high level of success of live performance humour can be attained when all performance and non-performance factors associated with a type category performer, venue setting and audience combine to produce a perfectly complete social context for live performance humour.

The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the aim of the thesis to show that the success of live performance humour is not determined solely by the competence of a performer and that failure is not determined solely by a specific and identifiable cause beyond the performer's control. The findings of this research will be put forward to show that there is no substance to an explanation of (un)successful live performance humour that is based entirely on the competence of a performer. A statement will be made that the level of success of live performance humour is determined by the specific performance and non-performance factors associated with a particular venue setting and an attendant ephemeral audience, that combine to form a particular social context for a particular performance at a particular time. The conclusion will confirm the sociological significance of the study, in order to define the substantive base of the statements made on the production of (un)successful live performance humour from the findings of the research that has been undertaken for the purpose of the thesis.

Theory

May's (1993) statement that 'as social researchers, our findings on the social world are devoid of meaning until situated in social theory' (p.23), clearly defines the relationship between theory and method as an essential consideration in the process of social research. Crotty (1998) argues that such a consideration is essential because the process of social research requires a choice of methodologies and methods to be made as to how research is carried out and presented. He states that any choice of methodologies and methods involves a

range of epistemological and ontological 'assumptions about reality that we bring to our work' and 'of what human knowledge is, what it entails, and what status can be ascribed to it' (p.2). Recognising the profound implications that such choices and assumptions have in the process of social research, must, therefore, compel the researcher to address them in order to justify 'what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate' (Maynard cited in Crotty, p.8).

With the aim of this research to provide both adequate and legitimate explanations of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice, the theoretical base of the study is to allow for explanations of the behaviour of social actors participating in the social practice to incorporate structural factors associated with social context and venue setting. This is to say that the theoretical base of the research is to provide for explanations that can be considered to be more adequate and complete by being based on linkages between macro- and micro-levels of explanation. It is, therefore, not a prescriptive theoretical base characterised by problems of indeterminacy arising from attempting to systematically relate the analysis of individual meaning, intentions and action to larger social contexts. Such indeterminacy derives from a distinction being made between two different levels of analysis: between micro-level explanations of the action of subjects and macro-level explanations of the structures in which actions take place.

> Indeterminacy is by itself a good reason to reject both holistic and individualist one-sided explanations of norms or any other social phenomenon: structures neither determine nor condition actors simply to reproduce them, nor do actors simply create or constitute the conditions under which they act. Instead, action and structure are linked and mediated in diverse ways, the variety of which a good social theory is supposed to organise conceptually and explain empirically.
>
> (Bohman, 1991, p.167)

In order to avoid indeterminacy that would effectively undermine explanations of individuals as agents participating in a social practice, Bohman argues it is essential to develop 'linkages' in macro/micro explanations, rather than to

produce explanations that are based on questions relating to theory and method being developed in order to reduce one to the other. He states that, 'For the empirical purpose of constructing better explanations, ... the distinction between macro- and micro-levels is at best an analytic one, marking a continuum of theoretical concepts that figure in an adequate explanation rather than a dichotomy between distinct levels of social ontology' (p.149). He argues linkages are to allow macro-level explanations to be extended to include actions that produce and reproduce practices and structures. This, he claims, adds 'greater explanatory completeness' to the full analysis of action and interaction among individuals, which 'a closer examination of the shortcomings of a reductionist programme like ethnomethodology indicates' (pp.164-65). Therefore, in order to provide explanations that can resist being charged with the undermining criticism of indeterminacy - as being either micro-level reductionism or macro-level structural determinism - Bohman states that both macro- and micro-level explanations must be expanded in the direction of the other in order to resolve their indeterminacy, if they are to be explanations at all, as by themselves they are bound to be incomplete and indeterminate (p.156).

The acknowledged importance of macro- and micro-linkage is a central tenet to the theoretical base of this research. It is accepted that linkage will contribute significantly to the research being allowed to proceed without being driven by theory to affect the kinds of explanations and the way the phenomenon of live performance humour is studied. Linkage is recognised as being vital to secure the explanations put forward, of the behaviour of social actors in the social practice of (un)successful live performance humour, away from the criticism of indeterminacy. For example, if the work is perceived as having used micro to replace macro in order to provide explanations of the behaviour of social actors in a particular setting, the explanations would be exposed to criticism as being indeterminate and incomplete. The criticism would stem from the work being identified as reductionist methodological individualism of micro orientated theories, which would deny the autonomy of structures characterised by a collective subject and would reduce claims of conformity to norms and values to

highly reflexive micro-management of interactions by knowledgeable agents. The potential for such criticism has encouraged the removal of the research from an ethnomethodological theoretical base, given that ethnomethodological conceptions of the setting is to use the setting itself to provide explanatory features rather than the situated reflexive social actors in the setting. Such a position raises the problem of micro-level characterisation of order as merely a contingent accomplishment of individual subjects possessing the practical abilities necessary to make the world appear an ordered place. A further point to remove the research from an ethnomethodological approach in favour of linkage of micro- and macro-levels of explanation, is that, like phenomenology, there is no significant consideration of structure informing a conceptualisation of an objective world beyond people's interpretations and everyday understandings.

> If, indeed, the guiding thoughts and principles of the mind at each moment are only the result of external causes which act upon it, then the reasons for my affirmation are not the true reason for this affirmation. They are not so much reasons as causes working from the outside. Hence the postulates of the psychologist, the sociologist, and the historian are stricken with doubt by the results of their own researches.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Filmer et.al., 1972, p.121)

In accepting the importance of macro- and micro-linkage to the adequacy and completeness of explanations of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice, the theoretical base of this research does not accept holistic conceptualisations of structure which refer to social object as an external reified or (economic) reductionist reality of antecedent causality determining individual social action (sui generis) within a particular social milieu. The social theory that is central to the formulation of the theoretical base of this study is Giddens's Theory of Structuration. This is because Giddens conceptualises linkage in macro- and micro-level explanations in the way he develops Structuration Theory on the premise that the dualism between subject (the knowledgeable human agent at the micro-level) and social object (society at the macro-level) 'has to be reconceptualised as a duality - the duality of structure' (1984, p.xxi). He regards the division between macro and micro as a methodological residue of

the dualism of structure and action which can be overcome by recognising the 'duality of structure'.

> The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize.
>
> (Giddens, 1984, p.25)

Structure for Giddens, as recursively organised sets of rules and resources, is marked by an 'absence of the subject'. However, while he calls for a 'decentring of the subject' he does not accept that this implies 'the evaporation of subjectivity into an empty universe of signs. Rather, social practices, biting into space and time, are considered to be at the root of the constitution of both subject and social object' (1984, p.xxii). Craib (1992) argues that Giddens' notion of structure is developed using 'structuralism as an analogy and a prompt', where the notion of structure itself is 'an underlying framework of elements and rules from which practices are produced by conscious actors' (p.27). Giddens states that structure can be conceptualised abstractly as two aspects of rules; as 'normative elements' and 'codes of signification' (1984, p.xxxi), which work both as rules and resources which social actors draw upon and implement as they engage others in interaction. For Giddens, social structures are not external to the social actor; they do not impose rules that pattern social relationships rather they are embodied in social practices. Therefore, following the work of Giddens, this research works with a notion of structure that refers to live performance humour in the social context of a venue setting as social practice, and (un)successful live performance humour to refer to the production and reproduction of the social practice on the basis of agency and interaction of capable and knowledgeable[2] social actors in a particular place at a particular time.

> The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time.
>
> (Giddens, 1984, p.2)

Accepting Giddens's proposition that social existence occurs in space and time rather than being imposed by an external structure as rules that pattern social relationships, this research does not aim to establish a model of (un)successful live performance humour as an empirical base from which to confirm or disconfirm theory from being able to predict patterns of behaviour in order to strengthen any claim to the validity of explanations of success or failure (in terms of social structure). It is acknowledged that such models require the sociologist to select certain aspects of reality from the 'chaotic reality of social events' which therefore render validity as a 'matter of the internal logic of the models and their susceptibility to disconfirmation by unquestioned research techniques' (Pillipson, 1972, p.85). The social research involved in this study of live performance humour is highly reflexive and is dedicated to demonstrate the 'chaotic reality of social events' involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice in a particular social context at a particular time in a particular place. Consequently, the research accepts Giddens's rejection of the proposition that theory must consist essentially of generalisations if it is to have explanatory content. The explanations that are put forward in the thesis will be shown later in the chapter to be able to claim validity and generalisability from the methodological coherence of the qualitative research within the situated social theory of Structuration. Generalisation will be shown not to refer to the uncovering of circumstances which 'act' upon agents, which Giddens identifies as a central precept to the 'orthodox consensus' of structural sociology that has established generalisation as a prerequisite to the formation of laws. In this thesis generalisability is taken from Giddens to refer to 'the provision of conceptual means for analysing what actors know about why they act as they do, particularly either where they are not aware (discursively) that they know it, or where actors in other contexts lack such awareness' (1984, pp. xix - xx).

The validity of the findings and the explanations put forward will be shown to be located within the qualitative methodology of the research. Giddens stipulates in his guidelines for social research that it is a necessarily 'anthropological' or

ethnographic process. Layder et. al's. (1991) analysis of the research implications of Structuration Theory gives a clear indication that this emphasis is substantively located within the established theoretical base of Giddens' work.

> In Giddens' terms all strategic activity has an irreducible interpretive component and, as a consequence, all social research has an ethnographic aspect to it ... As a result, all social research must be sensitive to the "complex skills" which actors display in their day-to-day activities...
>
> (Layder et. al., cited in Jones, 1993, p.165)

The field work undertaken for this study, in order to record and be 'sensitive to the complex skills which actors have in co-ordinating the contexts of their day-to-day behaviour' (1984, p.285), is based primarily on the use of the qualitative methods of participant observation and informal interviews conducted as casual conversations. The approach is to collect data which can be used to provide explanations of the action of social actors involved in the social practice of live performance humour 'either where they are not aware (discursively) that they know it, or where actors in other contexts lack such awareness'. This is to say, that the research for this thesis is not definitively interpretative, hermeneutic or ethnographic, nor is it based on an ethnomethodological or phenomenological theoretical base in that it geared ultimately and exclusively to understanding the action of individuals in a particular setting. Therefore, in order to explain the notion of qualitative research being geared, as it is in this research, to be both explanatory and generalising, it is necessary to provide further reference detail from the social theory of Structuration in which it is located.

While Giddens draws heavily on Gadamer's version of hermeneutics to argue for a thick descriptive ethnographic base to social research, he disagrees with Gadamer and states that hermeneutics should be viewed as providing a basis for explanation rather than being concerned exclusively with understanding action. This is because he distinguishes between the reasons given for an action and the motives, which tend to be unconscious, that may have produced it. Thus in his reconstruction of social theory and methodology Giddens proposes four layers of consciousness and action which should be taken into account. The 'reflexive

monitoring' of social actors using discursive consciousness to monitor their interaction in particular settings, and the 'rationalisation of action' that social actors use to give reasons for their action, are the layers at which an understanding of action can be recorded from social research. However, he insists that layers of 'practical consciousness' and 'unconscious motivation' exist in that the reasons social actors attach to their actions may not correspond to the mutual knowledge tacitly employed by them and which they may not be able to articulate or be aware of in the production of social encounters (1984, p.6). As a result, in order to provide explanation from social research, the divergence of action and consciousness must be recognised and incorporated within four related levels at which he proposes social research can occur. These levels are intended to reinforce the significance of the duality of structure and are not offered as a means to shift the focus of research on to one extreme at the exclusion of the other. Hence, while Giddens acknowledges that levels 1 and 2 can be located to qualitative research and 3 and 4 to quantitative, he does not accept the distinction as substantive as it reflects the dualism between macro and micro rather than linkage based on the duality of structure. This leads him to recommend the use of his revised hermeneutic aim for social research in his conception of the application of the double hermeneutic, which can be both explanatory and generalising when it has to do with answering why-questions at level 1 about the mutual intelligibility of divergent frames of meaning (1984, p.328). At level 2, which refers to the investigation of context and form of practical consciousness, he states that various investigations at level 1 across a variety of contexts, within a society or between societies, can be compared and generalisations established about common elements of a range of types of practical consciousness, including efforts to probe unconscious meanings. These levels occur in this research as type categories of performance and venue settings are established in order to develop detail from comparative work and provide (double hermeneutic) generalisations about common elements to type categories. Theoretical sampling is used to refine analytic categories of venue setting which are arrived at after intensive study of one setting: working men's clubs in the North-East of England.

Level 3 of Giddens's proposal for the conduct of social research focuses on the limits of social actors' knowledgeability in the shifting context of space and time, which includes the study of unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions of action. Level 4 deals with the conditions of social and system integration through the identification of the main institutional components of social systems, be they total societies or other smaller of larger systems (1984, pp.328-9). These levels occur in this research as the work seeks to explain the unpredictability of live performance humour as social practice in terms of the shifting specificity of the particular context of a particular venue setting at a particular time. This is to take account of Giddens's notion of 'positioning' in that the social encounters of social actors are considered within the immediate circumstances of co-presence in relation to others (as members of an audience and performers) and the importance of social context (1984, pp.xxiv-v). This research also develops social and system integration through the identification of individual physical and social factors that can combine to constitute institutional components of a venue setting. This will be demonstrated using working men's clubs and their location in the North-East region of England as an exemplar, which acknowledges Giddens' view of regionalisation as a significant aspect of Structuration Theory, in that locales are not just conceived of as places but settings of interaction that are central to concerns of how 'interaction in contexts of co-presence is structurally implicated in systems of broad time-space distanciation' (1984, p.xxiv). He states,

> settings are also regionalized in ways that heavily influence, and are influenced by, the serial character of encounters. Time-space fixity also normally means social fixity; the substantially 'given' character of the physical *milieux* of day-to-day life interlaces with routine and is deeply influential in the contours of institutional reproduction. Regionalization also has strong psychological and social resonance in respect of the 'enclosure' from view of some types of activities and some types of people and the 'disclosure' of others.
>
> (Giddens, 1984, pp.xxv-vi)

Hence, the implementation of levels 3 and 4 within this research is undertaken with a clear recognition of the importance of the time-space constitution of social life to Structuration Theory.

> Analysing the time-space co-ordination of social activities means studying the contextual features of locales through which actors move in their daily paths and the regionalization of locales stretching away across time-space
> (Giddens, 1984, p.286)

This study aims to allow for all 4 levels to occur in this research without one being developed at the expense or exclusion of another. Consequently the presentation of the findings and conclusions put forward from the research correspond to a literary style that Giddens recommends should be used to communicate and mediate between frames of meaning in order to describe a social world to those who are unfamiliar with it. While acknowledging Giddens' view of the necessarily anthropological or ethnographic task of social research, the presentation of the work for this thesis is not, however, a 'thick description' as recommended by Geertz (1975) as this research is not an ethnographic study. But Giddens does concede that thick description is not necessary 'where the activities studied have generalized characteristics familiar to those to whom the "findings" are made available, and where the main concern of the research is with institutional analysis, in which actors are treated as large aggregates or as "typical" in certain respects' (1984, p.285). However, given that an aim of this research is to demonstrate the characteristic complexity of significant combinations of individual physical and social factors involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice, 'typicality' is to refer primarily to the generalisations that are to be given as part of the explanations of (un)successful live performance humour. This is to refer to 'typicality' and explanatory generalisability of findings in terms of the relationship between Structuration Theory and methods demonstrated by Willis (1977), which Giddens commends as an exemplar of Structuration research.

The theoretical base that has been established for this research is therefore given to allow for a qualitative methodological approach to the collection (and presentation) of data, upon which adequate and complete explanations of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice can be put forward. This is to state clearly, that the methods and methodology of the research are not separated from social theory and, therefore, the findings from the research do

adhere to May's (1993) statement and are not devoid of meaning as they are substantively situated in social theory.

Methodology

I have chosen to use the term qualitative research to describe the methodological basis of the fieldwork undertaken for the thesis. This is because it is a term that is broad enough to highlight the descriptive nature of the research and it can mark a clear contrast with quantitative approaches in sociological research. The term is also broad enough to denote a methodological paradigm in which common underlying principles, that are embodied in epistemological and ontological underpinnings, are shared by variously labelled research methodologies. For example, naturalistic inquiry, ethnographic methodologies and interpretative research are all value-bound qualitative research and they all aim to describe the validity of real life experiences of individuals in a particular social context (Bulmer, 1984; Bryman, 1988). As these roughly synonymous labels are prone to be revised, split and changed over time, such as labelling various levels of ethnography from macro studies of a complex society to micro ethnography of a single social situation, Werner and Schoepfle (1987) conclude that 'the ethnographic variety is almost limitless' (cited in Ely, 1997, p.3). This point is compounded by Coffey (1999) who refers to the range of revisionist debates within ethnography, such as feminist ethnography, the ethnographer as self in research and the literary turn in ethnography utilising genres such as auto/biography and personal narrative/confessional. The ensuing debates from within a particular label create an inevitable preoccupation for researchers to substantively (re)define the label on the grounds of the specific claims they have to make about what they can and cannot do as researchers. One example of the result of such activity is put forward by Tesch (1990), who compiled a list of forty-six terms that social scientists have used to name their versions of qualitative research (cited in Ely, 1997, p.3).

The term qualitative research, as it refers to this thesis, and, as Ely argues, as it refers perhaps to any other research outside of a positivist paradigm, 'is perhaps better understood by the characteristics of its methods than by a definition' (p.4). Ely refers to the work of Sherman and Webb (1988) who analysed the work of leading qualitative researchers in the fields of 'philosophy of education, history, biography, ethnography, life history, grounded theory, phenomenography, curriculum criticism, uses of literature in qualitative research, and critical theory':

> Their analysis produced five characteristics similar to all of those species of qualitative research, and one that is characteristic of many.
> 1 Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore, a qualitative researcher immerses her/himself in the setting.
> 2 The contexts of inquiry are not contrived; they are natural. Nothing is predefined or taken for granted.
> 3 Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives.
> 4 Qualitative researchers attend to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables. The aim of qualitative research is to understand experience as unified.
> 5 Qualitative methods are appropriate to the above statements. There is no one general method.
> 6 For many qualitative researchers, the process entails appraisal about what was studied.
>
> (Ely, 1997, p.4)

Sherman and Webb summarised these characteristic points stating that,

> ... qualitative implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone' .... Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it (1988, p.7).
>
> (cited in Ely, 1997, pp.4-5)

A similar six-point list of the characteristic criteria of qualitative research is put forward by Bryman (1988, pp.61-69), while Denzin (1970) lists six characteristics of interactionism's methodological principles (pp.7-19), that are again very close to Sherman and Webb's. The research undertaken for this thesis embodies all of the points that are given in these lists as the defining characteristics of qualitative research and, therefore, the research is defined as

qualitative. However, following Ely's recommendation, a better understanding of what this actually means in terms of the methodology of the thesis can be produced by detailing the characteristics of the methods used rather than the definition of the methodology.

Method

The principal method used in the fieldwork undertaken for the study is participant observation. As this is a method that relies entirely on the researcher, who 'becomes the instrument of data collection' (Brown, 1984, cited in May, 1993, p.116; Seale, 1998, p.217: Van Maanen,1983, p.21), there are significant variations in the application of the method that stem from the role taken by the researcher in the field. Burgess (1991), Gold (1958) and Junker (1960) identify four possible roles that are distinguishable by the manner in which the researcher participates in the social world of the group being studied and, as a result, Wolcott (1988), who identifies three possible roles, argues it therefore becomes necessary to clarify what the term participant observation means within the particular circumstances of a specific study.

> It is fair to ask anyone who claims the title as a participant observer to provide a fuller description about how each facet - participant, observer, and the precarious nexus between them is to be played out in an actual research setting.
>
> (Wolcott, 1988, p.45)

Because live performance humour fundamentally requires an audience of spectators to attend and interact with a performance, the particular circumstances of this study demand participation based upon observation as a member of an audience. Consequently, my role as a researcher is based upon an assumed role as an ordinary member of an audience, with my identity as a researcher hidden from performers and members of an audience, in order for me to engage fully in the activities of the setting without the people involved in that setting being aware they are being studied. This research role is described as a 'complete participant' because research activities and intentions are totally concealed

behind an assumed role as an accepted group member; and it is directly associated with the method of covert participant observation (Burgess, 1991; Gold, 1958). To implement this method effectively, Jules-Rosette (1978) argues complete participant researchers should not just 'pass' as a member, but actually become a member. However, the feasibility of this is largely dependent upon the research setting, as to actually become a member in some settings is exceptionally difficult and can impose potentially debilitating practical and ethical dilemmas on the researcher. For example, covert researchers in some settings may be called upon to participate in highly questionable activities, which they must successfully negotiate if they are to maintain field relations that enable them to continue to work effectively as a group member (Humphreys, 1970; Norris, 1993; Patrick, 1973). In recognition of this, Polsky (1985) identifies one research setting that is not suited to complete participant research, 'in doing field research on criminals you dammed well better not pretend to be 'one of them', because they will test this claim out' (p.117). A complete participant researcher who is tested to the point of not being able to maintain field relations, will either have to leave the field completely, or accept that the quality of the data collected from the method of covert participant observation will be adversely affected. Indeed, even without such demanding tests of group membership, the assumed role of the complete participant researcher provides a basis for orthodox criticism of the practicability of covert participant observation. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) show the main points of this criticism to be based on the researcher being implicated in existing social practices and expectations in a far more rigid manner than the overt researcher. They point out that this will restrict research activity to be 'hedged round these pre-existing social routines and realities', which will make it difficult to 'arrange actions in order to optimise data collection possibilities', as the researcher must to act in accordance with existing role expectations in order to maintain field relations (pp.94-95). They also point out significant ethical issues that can be raised against covert research, such as working without the informed consent of the people being studied, control of data and confidentiality.

The particular circumstances of this research setting did not allow for such restrictive practical and ethical issues to develop that could undermine the effective application of the method of covert participant observation and therefore adversely affect the quality of data collected. For example, where access to the field as a complete participant may be regulated by 'gatekeepers' and 'sponsors' in some research settings, which can compel the researcher to create an elaborate character portrayal of an assumed role, of gang member for example, where maintaining cover is paramount, this research setting, in stark contrast, offers initial access to the field as an ordinary member of the public who can pay the price of admission to watch a performance as an ordinary member of an audience. This is not a research setting that presented any significantly challenging demands to me playing the role of audience member. Rather, it afforded me every opportunity to maintain my cover by simply being one more person in a grouping of strangers who know normatively how to behave like a member of an audience in a particular place. This is to state clearly that the circumstances of this research setting are considered to be conducive to a complete participant role as a member of an audience; both in terms of the practical implementation of the method of covert participant observation and the ethical justification of the research. While Ely (1997) argues that 'Qualitative research is an ethical endeavour' and that ethics are 'woven throughout every step of the methodology' (p.218), she refers to Lofland and Lofland (1984) to substantiate her view that qualitative researchers are able to address ethical dilemmas as they arise in a particular research setting to maintain the integrity of the research. It is to state categorically that the circumstances of this research setting did not produce ethical dilemmas that were not able to be addressed satisfactorily in order to prevent the research from being 'ethically justified', from carrying out an 'investigation that does not deliberately damage the reputation of those studied' (Denzin, 1970, p.33).

Although the circumstances of this research setting are conducive to complete participant research, the role of audience member did have to be assumed and enacted insofar as research intentions and activities were concealed. Hence the

quality of data collected is invariably dependent upon playing this role successfully, which is ultimately determined by my presence in the field being unobtrusive and not influencing the 'natural' setting in which the behaviour being observed takes place. To this end of maintaining the 'natural state' of the social world of the group being studied, access is not defined as an initial point of entry to the field, but as effectively maintaining the role of complete participant throughout the duration of the fieldwork. This level of access is not guaranteed by live performance humour being conducted in a public space. Karp (cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) showed that even the most basic form of access as an initial point of entry to the physical setting of a public place, such as streets, shops or cinemas, can be severely restricted if the researcher is not able to successfully assume a role of complete participant in the social world of the public setting (pp.57-58).

To achieve the required level of access to the field, and maintain a complete participant role that will not disturb the natural state of the setting, Coffey (1999) argues it is necessary for the researcher, as an embodied social actor, to produce a 'fieldwork body' that is both acceptable and plausible to the group under investigation. Following the work of Goffman (1959) in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, she claims the impression management of body goes far beyond dress and adornment in the negotiation of access and field role(s)

> Clothing can establish a particular sort of embodied image. Speech vocalizes the physical body. Demeanour is concerned with the positioning and performing of the body. Props (such as jewellery, instruments, artefacts) are used to decorate, and may be used to legitimize the fieldwork body. Thought of in this context, the practical accomplishment of fieldwork is synonymous with the practical accomplishment of body management, production and image.
>
> (Coffey, 1999, p.65)

For my access to the field to be achieved successfully in this research setting I had to manage my presence as a legitimate member of an audience in each of the venue settings I attended. This was achieved by changing the key factors of body management, that Coffey identifies as, clothing, speech, demeanour and props, in order to adapt accordingly to each venue setting. For example, I would describe

my 'clothing' as more formally casual for some performances in some venue settings, such as theatre and cabaret and this would be changed to a less formal smart casual for venues such as working men's club concert rooms on a Saturday night, to a more relaxed casual attire worn to fringe and some comedy club venues. Wearing the right clothes to a venue setting was important as it did allow me to blend in and it did help me to feel as though I was thoroughly inconspicuous as a complete participant researcher in an audience. 'Speech' proved to be an important factor, especially in the setting of the working men's club which is a setting characterised by talkativeness.[3] Here both the content and the dialect of speech had to be managed correctly in order to present the requisite embodied image of myself as a legitimate (working class) presence in the setting. This afforded me the advantage of biographical credibility that enabled me to engage easily in the 'patter' of informal conversations with other audience members without them knowing I was a researcher doing research. 'Demeanour' is an important consideration in every venue setting as each has characteristic social rules, norms and conventions, such as passive attentive viewing in a theatre, that must be adhered to if an effectively unobtrusive complete participant role is to be maintained. Hence, the action of making field notes in a venue setting, as discreetly as possible, altered my demeanour sufficiently to have some members of an audience watching me rather than the performance. Because this reaction of audience members was experienced in each of the venue settings I tried to make notes in, I was effectively prevented from being unobtrusive in the setting and therefore had to stop making notes as a result. The main 'prop' used to promote the plausible acceptance of my fieldwork body was the type of alcoholic beverage that was fashionable in the venue setting being attended. For example, I would be seen to drink dark beer from a pint glass in working men's clubs and lager from a trendy brand bottle in a comedy club or fringe venue. To the end that I did not experience or feel any sense of my presence as a member of an audience being an intrusion that altered the 'natural state' of the setting, the practical accomplishment of my fieldwork body as a complete participant was managed correctly. When it was not managed correctly

I did experience my presence being obtrusive and an undoubted influence on the natural state of the setting.[4]

Working to successfully maintain a legitimate presence as an audience member did create a practical difficulty in recording data. As has been mentioned, each time I tried to make field notes during the time of a performance the setting was altered significantly by my behaviour. Being aware that some members of an audience were observing me rather than the performance, led to a simple coding scheme being devised that could be completed immediately after my attendance at a venue setting - usually in my car before driving home. The scheme is divided into three sections: 'physical', 'social' and 'performance' and each section has three categories that are sub-divided to code observations (see example over).

The scheme has simple code word headings that act as a stimulus to remember things which can then be listed briefly under the headings until they are written up fully, usually within 24 hours.[5] With the assurance of being able to record observations immediately after leaving a venue setting, there was a freedom to settle down to the job of observing without having to concentrate on getting everything down on paper. With less time scribbling notes and more time watching what was going on around me, the simplicity of the scheme is considered to be practically advantageous to the quality of the observational work. Further, having such a simple scheme worked to nullify one of the main disadvantages that Atkinson (1992) associates with their use. This is the view that because coding schemes are based on a given set of categories, they furnish 'a powerful conceptual grid' (p.459) from which it is difficult to escape (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.39). Silverman makes the point that 'While this 'grid' is very helpful in organising the data analysis, it also deflects attention away from uncategorised activities' (p.39). This is to say that the quality of data collected from participant observation can be adversely affected by conceptual coding categories shaping what the researcher should be observing. By keeping the coding scheme simple in this research, uncategorised factors were therefore able

Venue Name:
Location:
Type:

Admission:
No. of Acts:
Performer:
Date:

Physical

Size

General	Capacity	No. of People	No. Seats	Stage

Seating

Type	Arrangement	No. Sitting	No. Standing	Customised

Systems

Sound	Lights	Heat	Special Provision	Standard Provision

Social

Demography

Age	Gender	Ethnic Origin	Class	Social Grouping

Demeanour

Active	Passive	Talking	Quiet	Main Focus

Drinking

Bar	Location	Active Time	Service	Food

Performance

	Success
Circuit	
Mainstream	
Extreme	

to be taken into account, which enhances the quality of data as it is not collected from observations restricted to conceptual categories.

Despite every effort being made to develop effective coding schemes and accomplish a legitimate fieldwork body as a complete participant researcher who does not disturb the natural state of the setting, there are criticisms that a participant researcher will inevitably influence the very phenomena being studied. The mainstay of such criticism derives from the charge of bias arising from two potential sources. One is 'over-rapport', where the task of systematic recording and analysis is abandoned in favour of the 'joys of participation' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, pp.97-98). The second source is the researcher's own subjective cultural experiences of 'socio-historical location' and 'particular biography', working to determine what the researcher chooses to observe (May, 1993, p.139). Both of these sources to the same basic criticism of researcher influence have been addressed in this research in order to prevent data collected from being critically devalued as subjective.

The particular circumstances of this research setting do not provide a substantive base for criticism of over-rapport with the subject group of the study. This criticism of complete participant research, which is more commonly referred to as 'going native', asserts that the researcher's critical detachment is compromised as a result of spending an extended period of time in the field. The longer the period of time in the field, the more a researcher can come to feel comfortably at home and part of the everyday lives of the people being studied, as close relationships are formed with members of the subject group for the purpose of being accepted by the group. Consequently, the criticism of going native refers directly to the reflexive critical self-awareness of the researcher being reduced by the process of 'becoming', which adversely affects the ability to collect, record and analyse data in a systematic and detached manner. While this research is based on an extended period of time in the field, it is not a temporal consistency with one subject group under investigation. The 300 hours[6] I spent as a member of an audience in venue settings observing live

performance humour in context, is put forward as an extended period of time in this research setting. But, it is an extended period of time that is broken into separate self-contained units of time that are different and transient, as they are the units of live performance humour time, which only apply to a particular performance in a particular venue setting. Therefore the 300 hours must be broken into roughly 3 hour units that reflect 100 attendance's at venue settings for live performance humour. This gives the study a temporal fluidity that refers to a significantly different research setting each time it is visited. This is because there are different combinations of different physical and social factors in each venue setting and there is a different grouping of people as an audience for different performances in different venue settings - and for the same performance staged at different times in the same venue setting. Consequently, the extended period of time allows for detailed observational data to be collected on a wide variety of contexts for live performance humour; and at the same time ensures a transient subject group of audience members as a result of the time of participation as a member of an audience being short and ending with a performance. A 'live' audience to a 'live' performance has a fundamental characteristic of being ephemeral, which means that when an audience leaves a venue setting it ceases to be the subject group being studied as each audience to a performance is a new group to be studied. Therefore, any involvement with a member of an audience lasted no more than the duration of their attendance at a venue setting for a performance and this prevented over-rapport developing from close relationships being formed with other audience members. It also prevented any possibility of 'becoming' a part of the particular subject group. Hence, the circumstances of this research setting contribute directly to my marginalisation as a complete participant researcher and this underpins a level of detachment in the field from which data collected can withstand criticism of bias from 'going native'.

To further guard against 'going native', it is recommended that the complete participant researcher should take frequent breaks from the field in order to have time to record detail, reflect upon and analyse data collected (Burgess, 1991;

Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; May, 1993). It is the essential character of this research setting to impose frequent breaks from the field. This gave me the time to return to the academic process, which Hobbs (1988) claims reinvigorates an awareness of the research perspective that helps prevent the researcher from 'going native' by 'going academic' (p.15). The circumstances of this research, therefore, allow for the advantages of an extended period of time in the field to be maximised, without providing any substance upon which to predicate concomitant criticisms of bias from going native.

The second issue to be addressed with regard to the quality of data collected from complete participant research, is the criticism of bias being imposed by the researcher's subjective view of what is worthy of collection as data. The source of this criticism is the concept of objectivity in social research, or to be more specific, a positivist conception of objectivity central to modernist notions of 'science' (Crotty, 1998, p.27). In qualitative social research, however, it is now widely acknowledged that the goal of pure objectivity is impossible to reach. It is accepted that as social researchers are 'subjective people doing a subjective job', the aim is to become 'more objective' rather than 'perfectly objective' (Ely, 1997, pp.53-54). Whereas a positivist conception of objectivity is founded on the complete removal of any influence brought to bear on the research subject by the researcher, such as values for example, the operationalised concept of objectivity in qualitative social research accepts that the researcher is part of the social world being studied. While this is to say that rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher and that the researcher should use their own cultural equipment to understand social action in context, there is the recognition that the researcher must develop a way of working that prevents the collection of data slipping into the realm of anecdotal descriptions of personal impressions. Ely (1997) recommends that qualitative researchers should, 'practice detailed observations without reading in our own answers, and biases', as part of a 'process [that] entails becoming increasingly more aware of our own 'eyeglasses', our own blinders, so that these do not color unfairly both what we observe and what we detail in writing' (p.54).

Coffey (1999) notes that there is a traditional school of thought that recommends the maintenance of social distance by qualitative researchers in order to be able to practice reflexivity effectively from a 'marginal' position of analytical 'strageness' and thereby raise the 'analytical astuteness' of the research (p.31). While she does point out there are critical alternatives to this view where researchers such as Willis (1977) feel that the quality of their work was enhanced by not maintaining this social distance, the criticism of this approach, and specifically Willis's work, put forward by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), is that the researcher comes too close to the group and loses observational and analytical astuteness because of this. Delamont (1996) moves the debate on researcher bias to collect worthy data away from the problematic of objectivity in terms of distance or detachment on the part of the researcher, to the problem of becoming more aware of things around us in a research setting that may be deemed unworthy of collection as data simply because of their mundane 'everydayness'. She claims seeing familiar things is a problem because the 'everydayness' confounds researchers to see 'nothing happens' and, therefore, it is 'the task of social scientists to make the familiar strange' (p.123). She recommends a number of strategies that can be used to challenge the familiarity of a setting, and the one chosen for this research setting, which will be outlined later in the chapter, is comparative work.

However, even without the use of a comparative strategy to make the familiar strange in order to accentuate verification and validity of data collected, the specific circumstances of this research setting are such that they invariably provide a constant challenge to an 'everydayness' developing to confound the researcher to see 'nothing happens'. This is because each venue setting is different, and this challenges the researcher to observe the detail of the physical and social factors of a particular setting, as well as observe different performances and their impact on the social context of that venue setting. Therefore, constant changes in this research setting prevent the quality of data collected being adversely affected by a dullness of observation being induced by a soporific familiarity with the 'everydayness' of the research setting. The

circumstances of this research setting also provide for observational vigilance to be maintained and perpetuated by the paradoxical marginality of my complete participant role as a member of an audience to a live public performance. Again this is attributable to the short time of my association with an audience as the subject group of the study and also to the status of the subject group, which, in most venue settings, can only be defined as a subject group in terms of their attendance at a particular place and time as an audience; and not by any other significantly specific criterion that can identify this gathering of strangers to a performance as the subject group of the research by any other means.[7] Thus, the short time of my association with an audience, and the status of an audience as the subject group of the study, imposes a social distance between myself as a complete participant researcher and the rest of the group that contributes to the objective integrity of data collected. This is because the social distance I experienced prevented any sense of 'becoming' or 'feeling at home', and instead, constantly created a sense of being a stranger in a group of strangers, which is an essential part of maintaining a more objective analytical perspective (Lofland, 1971; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

While it is a characteristic of this research setting to impose a marginalised position of social distance on myself as researcher from both audience members and performers, the collection and analysis of data will become more objective only if social distance is utilised for introspection and reflection on the fieldwork (Coffey, 1999). However, in order to fully utilise the social distance offered by the setting, I found the concept of social distance itself, as it applied to the particular circumstances of this research setting, had to be reflected upon and managed systematically as an integral part of the research. As a result, a completely different approach to the collection of data on performances was developed from that used in the fieldwork undertaken for the Master's thesis. In this research the decision was made not to interview any of the performers I watched. This was to avoid being drawn too close to the performers as I was in the Master's thesis, which allowed the comedians to develop their personalities

and professional status to bring me to accept their views on the causes of failure of live performance humour.

As mentioned earlier in the introdution, the centrality of interview data from professional comedians led the Master's thesis to recognise specific causes of failure that exist beyond a competent comedian's control. Without making any inference that the comedians lied intentionally in their interviews to protect their professional egos by blaming their performance failures on things they had no control over, there was found to be a selective inflection contained within the data collected from them. This was discovered from member checking individual comedian's accounts of one of their less than successful performances against accounts of the same performance given by members of the attendant audience. To differing degrees the comedians were not inclined to give the same kind of candid assessment of the unsuccessfulness of the particular performance as audience members did. Hence, in order to reduce the possibility that this research could be brought to a similar position of substantive inflection from performers' authoritative interview data, the decision not to interview performers was made on the grounds of maintaining and utilising the existent social distance between myself (as researcher) and performance; and myself (as complete participant researcher) and other audience members, in order to produce a more objective reflexive analytical quality to the research.

Validity

Apart from potential criticism arising from what Giddens refers to as the 'orthodox consensus' view of the non-generalisableness of data collected not being able to establish 'laws' pertaining to the determining influence of a particular social context of a venue setting in the production of (un)successful live performance humour, the validity of data gathered from the fieldwork undertaken for the research is regarded as supportable from other means of assessment. Silverman (1993) offers two sets of criteria for assessing and checking validity in qualitative field research. To assess validity of data he

recommends that the impact of the researcher on the research setting should be considered. If the researcher's presence disturbs the natural state of the setting to create what is referred to as a 'halo' or 'Hawthorne' effect, then validity will be compromised. It has been shown that the particular circumstances of this research setting provide a level of access as a complete participant researcher (as an ordinary member of the public becoming a legitimate member of an audience to a public performance) to fully implement the principal method of covert participant observation, as well as conduct opportunistic interviews in a covert manner. This is to say that this research setting accommodated my research activities without the natural state of the setting being disturbed by my presence as a researcher. Further, it is acknowledged that context is vitally important to the validity of all qualitative research (Van Maanen, 1983), as context enables social action to be understood in terms of 'people act and make sense of their world by taking meanings from their environment' (May, 1993, p.112). Hence, with an aim of the research to investigate the influence of social context on live performance humour, the fieldwork is designed emphatically not to disturb the natural state of the research setting that is effectively the social context for live performance humour. Consequently, both the aims and the circumstances of the research do not provide a substantive base for 'Hawthorne effect' type criticism of researcher influence to be levelled against it. Instead, the aims and the circumstances of the research are put forward as providing a situation from which the natural state of the research setting can be maintained as 'the relevant context of observation', which Kirk and Miller (1986) claim promotes reliability in qualitative observation' (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.146). Therefore, to assess validity on the criterion of my impact on the research setting provides support for the validity of data collected.

Two more points put forward by Silverman from which to assess validity of data, are the 'values of the researcher' and the 'truth-status of a respondent's account' (1993, p.156). With regard to the values of the researcher, again the circumstances of this research setting are advantageous to the fieldwork in that they neutralise the potential for researcher values to lead to bias. As has been

mentioned, the setting is characterised by natural breaks from the field, which facilitate reflection on both data collected and the fieldwork process. Also, the method of covert participant observation has what May (1993) describes as 'the advantages of flexibility' (p.124), which Denzin (1970) claims means that, 'the participant observer is not bound in his field work by pre-judgements about the nature of his problem, by rigid data-gathering devices, or by hypotheses' (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.48). This flexibility allowed for casual conversations to be entered into with other members of an audience as a means of gathering data that Silverman, in his criteria for checking validity, argues should be used to corroborate data and therefore provide a check against value judgements being made on observational data. This is following Becker's recommendation that the participant researcher should endeavour to enter into conversations with some or all of the participants in the situations he has observed, in order to discover their interpretations of the events he has observed (cited in Burgess, 1991, p.79). Again, the specific circumstances of this research setting provide for an opportunistic means of obtaining this data from other audience members to be developed within the naturalistic emphasis of the fieldwork. This is doing what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) advocate as 'collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (cited in Seale, 1998, p.217). Therefore the validity of data in this research is put forward as supportable from the covert nature of its collection, in that no form of information that might have influenced the actions of those being studied was made available to invalidate the findings (Seale, 1998, p.222). The validity of the findings from this covert and opportunistic approach to collecting data in a fieldwork setting characterised by natural breaks from the field, is regarded as an effective defence against any charge of researcher values being imposed on data.

A further feature of this research to contribute to the validity of fieldwork data, is the social distance imposed by the research setting. This facilitates a 'more objective' critical self awareness to be maintained, which is enhanced by my decision not to conduct in-depth interviews with performers and risk being drawn to level of empathy with them that could adversely effect the quality of

data collected from participant observation as the principal method in the research. The decision not to interview performers also addresses Silverman's third criterion of assessment of validity of data, which is the truth-status of respondent's accounts. Because the only interviews conducted in this research are covert and opportunistic as casual conversations, and because of the way data obtained from them is used as a supplementary qualification to the primary research emphasis on observational data, the truth-status of the interview data is accepted without exhaustive examination.

As the principal method of data collection, the participant observation used in this research is not the type associated with the semiotic style of paradigmatic ethnography that is aimed to uncover either complex webs of meaning in order to develop a 'thick description', or to elicit the underlying rules for behaviour as in an ethnomethodological study. The type of participant observation used in the fieldwork for this research follows the recommendations of Sacks and always holds focus on what is observable in behaviour and avoids that which is not observable, such as motivations or attitudes for example (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.52). Consequently, data collected from participant observation in this research setting is not used predictively or speculatively to impose explanations or thick descriptions of meanings, values or attitudes underlying the (un)successfulness of live performance humour. The type of participant observation used in the research is complementary to the practicality of its application, in that it is to observe the observable in a situation that allows the method to be applied effectively. Given that the aim of the research requires the collection of data that can demonstrate significant factors involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour, and that the (un)successfulness of live performance humour can be observed from behavioural responses such as laughter and smiling, as well as numerous observable physical reactions of displeasure exhibited by members of an audience that range from simply not laughing to booing and critical abuse of a performer, it is the essential character of the subject of the study to allow for the collection of data to be made primarily from participant observation. Also, with

the emphasis of the fieldwork on the collection of observable data on both performance and the context of a venue setting in which they take place, there is a combined situation for the implementation of participant observation in this research setting, as both sets of observational data are collected in one complete application of the method in the same spatial and temporal location which is fundamental to the aim of the research.

A comparative strategy

The research setting for this study is considered to be ideally suited to the application of a comparative strategy because of the contextual location of live performance humour in a wide variety of different venue settings. In addition to Delamont's (1996) recommended application of this strategy to challenge the familiarity of a setting, it is also used here to demonstrate the influence of the social context of different venue settings on the success of live performance humour. However, the comparative strategy is not used to record detailed variations between different venue setting categories, such as theatre, fringe or pier, for example, in order to establish a definitive social context appertaining to all venue settings in a category. The influence of factors such as audience composition, occasion, performer reputation and the performance itself, as well as significant differences in the physical and social structures of venue settings within a category, prevent a definitive social context being applied to all venue settings in a category. Hence, the type of participant observation used in the research is not behaviouristic in that it is designed to explain covarying patterns of behaviour in different institutional settings. This would be a completely different research emphasis and one deemed wholly inapplicable to the circumstances of this research setting, given the propensity for individual venue settings and venue setting categories to change over time. For example, the historical change of the theatre category (Chaney, 1993; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), or the commercially motivated changes to many venue settings in the comedy club category.[8] Also, at any given time there are significant differences between individual venue settings in each category, albeit that these

differences are more pronounced in some categories than others. For example, some fringe venues have bars selling alcohol and some do not. Some comedy clubs have a seated audience while others have standing audiences. Some theatres allow alcohol into the auditorium for some performances and others do not. In addition to this, the variable of performance can significantly influence behaviour in any one venue setting at a particular time. For example, an acknowledged audience pattern of undisciplined inattention can be changed to passive attentiveness by a 'good' performance and conversely, a pattern of passive attentive viewing can be turned to disaffected indiscipline by a 'bad' performer. This is to say, that the setting itself is not used to provide explanatory features rather than the situated reflexive social actors in the setting, which is why it is not the aim of the participant observation used in this research to gather data to identify and explain covarying patterns of behaviour in different settings.

The emphasis of the participant observation in this research is to collect data to show the social context of a venue setting rather than demonstrate covarying patterns of behaviour. Because the social context of a venue setting is based on the interactive dynamics between each particular audience (members) and performer, which this research aims to show are significantly influenced by a particular combination of physical and social factors associated with a venue setting at a particular time, the social context of a venue setting pertains to the moment of live performance humour rather than a pattern. While it is possible to observe the (un)successful moment of live performance humour in different venue settings and for comparisons to be drawn to demonstrate the significant factors involved in the production of those moments, it is not possible to use observational data to establish covarying patterns of category based social contexts that will determine the (un)successfulness of live performance humour. Such a claim to data collected would render the data invalid as the social context of a venue setting can only be claimed to increase the potential for probable behaviour of participants. Therefore, the effectiveness of a comparative strategy being used to support the validity of fieldwork data in this research, rests entirely

on the documented detail of the composite factors forming the social context of a venue setting that is commonly associated with a particular category.

Data used in the comparative work is collected from a number of different venue settings. However, because of basic restrictions of time, finance and physical distance, as well as availability in terms of numerical proportion, it has not been possible for me to visit every venue setting in the UK.[9] Hence, after a comprehensive study of one setting: working men's clubs in the North-East of England, theoretical sampling is used to refine the other categories of venue setting that are used comparatively. No attempt is made to find a statistically representative sample of settings, performers or audience member composition, instead a purposive sample is constructed to maximise certain relevant differences between settings and minimise others. The observations carried out across the theoretical sample are to test the applicability of eight analytic categories across the range of settings included in the study for live performance humour. As a result, commonly recognised categories of venue setting, such as theatre, comedy club and pier for example, are used as basic sample frames for comparative reference that enable data to be collected from a number of different venue settings in each of the eight named categories, that are detailed in chapter four, and listed below.

Venue setting category	**No. attended within category**
Cabaret	2
College	4
Comedy Clubs	7
Fringe	5
Pier	2
Public House	8
Theatre	6
Working Men's Clubs[10]	50+

What may be considered to be a low number of different venue settings attended in some categories is acknowledged as a potential source of criticism of the validity of data collected from the principal method of covert participant observation. This is because low numbers offer an initial point of reference to define the research as 'small scale', which enables criticism of validity of data to be predicated on it not being generalisable. Hammersley and Atkinson point out that, 'drawing data from 'natural' settings (as this research does) is no guarantee that ones findings are valid in other settings or in the same setting at other times' (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.27). May (1993) reiterates this point by focusing on the method of participant observation. He argues that the potential limitations of the method are a source of validation problems, because the method, 'demands that researchers spend time with relatively small groups of people in order to understand fully the social milieu which they inhabit' (p.131). Silverman (1993), also makes the point that a major problem with the validity of data from qualitative research is its lack of 'generalisability to larger populations' (p.171). However, to accept that the number of different venue settings attended in a category is low, is not to accept that this is a legitimate source of criticism of the validity, or reliability, of data collected in this research. This is because criticism deriving from the lack of generalisability is not accepted as substantive to this research which is situated within the social theory of Structuration. This is to say, that the criticism pertaining to generalisability is based upon what Giddens refers to as the 'orthodox consensus' view of structural sociology, which holds generalisation to refer to the uncovering of circumstances which act upon social actors and which are basic to the formation of 'laws'. As has been stated previously in the chapter, generalisability, as it is applied in this thesis, is taken from Giddens to refer to 'the provision of conceptual means for analysing what actors know about why they act as they do, particularly either where they are not aware (discursively) that they know it, or where actors in other contexts lack such awareness' (1984, pp. xix - x). Hence, criticism of the lack of generalisability adversely affecting the validity of the research (which does not seek to uncover patterns of behaviour) is not accepted as legitimate in terms of the established theoretical base within which the research is situated.

The way in which a comparative strategy is used in the context of the research is put forward as a basis to support the validity of the fieldwork data from it being able to be subject to verification from congruence. Gilbert (1993) makes the point that the verification of qualitative data from congruence requires that the detail of a research setting can be presented to a person who has not been in the setting, and that on the basis of that detail being studied, the person is able to enter the setting as a familiar environment in which they know how to act and what to expect (p.164). Therefore while the number of different venue settings attended in some categories may be deemed to be low, the claim of this data to be verifiable from congruence is supportable on the basis of the detail of a particular venue setting within a category being developed by attending the same venue setting a number of times. For example, there are six different theatres listed in that category, but I have attended one of those theatres - the Newcastle City Hall, on numerous occasions over an extended period of time to watch different performances. This provides for a greater amount of detail to be collected, which effectively enhances the verification of data from congruence as the social context of a venue setting can be documented at different times, and any changes in the social context of the setting can be noted from a comparative analysis of the different accounts. Further, the prolonged period of engagement and persistent observation is itself recognised as a basis of validity and credibility of observational data (Erlandson, 1993; Giansante in Ely, 1997).

It is acknowledged that to put forward data collected in this research setting as verifiable from congruence is difficult given the peculiarity of each venue setting, in a wide variety of differently categorised venue settings, to be subject to ephemeral changes in 'atmosphere' from a particular combination of contextual factors that include audience and performance. This is to say that my description of a particular comedy club, for example, may not be what a new person in the setting will experience at the time of their entry into the field. Yet, verification from congruence is deemed to be attainable for fieldwork data collected for this research, if the detail of an individual venue setting is documented at times of both successful and unsuccessful performances; and a

new researcher enters the unfamiliar setting within a reasonable period of time after that documentation to watch a recognisably typical performance for the setting. Again, the circumstances of this research setting provide the person entering the field for the first time with a level of access necessary to enable them to conduct the verification exercise, effectively and credibly, as a complete participant who should be able to maintain the natural state of the setting that has been documented. In accepting that the performance and the group of individuals forming the audience will not be exactly the same, verification from congruence can result if the documented detail supplied to a complete participant, as verifier assuming the role of audience member, is acknowledged as providing a practical familiarity with the setting, rather than a precise pattern of what exactly the setting will be and what will happen in it. To restate, it is not the aim of the comparative strategy used in this research to establish covarying patterns of behaviour in different venue settings based on data collected from participant observation undertaken in those settings.

The use of a comparative strategy in this research is designed specifically to demonstrate the social context of live performance humour, by being able to show the social context of a comedy club, for example, in comparison to the social context of a theatre for example. While attending a greater number of different venue settings in each category may have confirmed typical features associated with their location in that category, the numbers attended did provide data that enabled each venue setting located within a familiarly named category to be recognised as having some significantly basic features that were found to be characteristic of the category. For example, venue settings in a comedy club category have a sufficiency of characteristic features to be distinguishable from other venue setting categories. This is an adequate level of distinction as all that is required is that the category labels can be used to identify different venue settings in order for the comparative strategy to be applied. But to compare a comedy club to a theatre or working men's club requires the detail of a specific example of a venue setting within those categories. This is because there is absolutely no claim being made in this research that there is a definitive social

context attributable to all comedy clubs, theatres or all venues within any other of the categories. Each venue setting in each category has the potential to produce a particular social context for live performance humour at a particular time - and the use of the familiarly named categories serve only as a label to identify different social contexts for live performance humour that can be referred to in order to provide a comparative illustration of the influence of context in the production of (un)successful live performance humour.

To conclude, the fieldwork for this research has been designed to fully utilise the particular circumstances of the research setting in order to maximise the effective collection of valid data. Throughout, the fieldwork has been reflected upon and critically examined against each of the six points Bruyn (1966) identifies as the basis of the 'subjective adequacy' of qualitative research. Additionally, a comparative strategy is used to support verification, validity and credibility of the fieldwork data, that are used propitiously and circumspectly to meet the stated aims of the thesis. Throughout the thesis a review of relevant literature is given to provide a substantive and comprehensive base of reference material on specific issues relating to the study as they arise, in order to support the findings and the conclusions put forward.

Chapter One

The aim of this chapter is to establish the subject of the research under the title of 'live performance humour'. This title does, however, appear at first to have serious shortcomings given the wide variety of forms of humorous performance that could be included in it generically. A pantomime, for example, can be classed as a form of live performance humour and so can a Ray Cooney West-End farce. But, as these forms are not to be considered in the research, then a title that seems unable to differentiate between forms in a way that can identify the single form of performance that is central to this study, could be deemed to be wholly inadequate. The term 'comedian' suggests potential for a definitive subject title as it identifies a type of live performance humour and it does not offer an opportunity for confusion with other forms. A pantomime, for example, can be regarded as a form of live performance humour, but it cannot be defined as the performance of a comedian. Even when recognised professional comedians play principal characters in a pantomime, there is no possibility of anyone saying they thought Aladdin was a comedian. However, the apparent precision of 'comedian' as a ready-made title will be shown to be superficially convenient and unable to act substantively as a definition of the subject of this thesis.

What is a comedian?

The subject of the research is the work of men and women who aim to earn a living by going on stage in front of an audience with the intention of giving a performance that the audience will find funny. Many of these men and women are described as comedians/comediennes. Whether or not this is an appropriate description will depend upon certain features of performance being evident that are seen to characterise the work of a professional comedian. Charney (1978), for example, identifies verbal dexterity and timing as key features that characterise the performance of a comedian. He regards comedy as an,

'intrinsically oral art [that] is dependent on the time element for its effects' and he argues that comedians tend to be masters of timing in the way they can delay and control the 'movement of a joke' to the exact moment when the punchline will have maximum effect (p.45). He claims, 'it is not so much the joke that is funny, but the whole experience of listening to the joke' and that it is essential for the joke-teller to master an audience: 'With a perfect sense of timing, the joke-teller can instinctively feel the right rhythm for the delivery and whether to give more or less at any particular moment' (p.45).

Paton (in Powell and Paton (eds.) 1988) singles out the telling of jokes to an audience as the principal characteristic of a professional comedian,

> the role of a professional comedian is to elicit or invoke laughter in other persons by telling jokes about subjects, objects, or human situations which his listeners can cognise or perceive as being humorous.
>
> (Paton, in Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988, p. 207)

Paton goes on to describe a comedian as a 'performing artist' with a 'verbal art form': namely the telling of jokes (p.208).

Both Charney and Paton's description of an audience as 'listeners' compounds the aural rather than the visual requirement of a comedian to be funny. It places the funniness of a comedian on the content of his or her jokes and his or her ability to tell them using the prerequisite skills of the 'verbal artist' that Paton calls 'style properties' (1988, p.209). With the definition of a comedian being based on a verbal/joke telling performance criterion, is the accompanying image of a stand-up performer on stage doing little else to make people laugh other than cracking jokes into a microphone. It is predominantly this type of performance that makes it difficult to think of a comedian as a performer who does not tell jokes. A stand-up joke-telling comedian called Bob Monkhouse, makes this point on stage during the course of his act, when he says that a comedian has the only job in the world that makes people feel as though they can demand your services. He complains that no matter where you are; as soon as people hear you are a comedian they will say, 'go on then tell me a joke'. His observation

builds into a joke based on the claim that no other job description produces a similar type of response from other people - the same man asking a comedian for a joke would not ask a gynaecologist to have a quick look at his wife.[1] Lee Evans (winner of the 1993 Perrier comedy award) has pointed out in his act that because he is recognised as a 'comedian' he has to put up with people who pull him aside in order to tell him jokes that are usually full of filth and racist crap.[2]

At first, cracks started to appear in the term comedian as a definition of the subject of the thesis, when account had to be made of the variety of performances the term had to cover. It was found that to persist with the definition of a comedian as a teller of jokes to an audience would severely limit the scope of the research because it is too restrictive as a definitive subject title. It cuts off many variations of comedy performance that do not rest on the telling of jokes by performers, whose sole intention is to make an audience laugh in order to be able to define the performance as successful. Consequently, any attempt to define 'comedian' will invariably exclude some of the range of the form of live performance humour that apply to this study. For example, humorous performances that are visually, musically, or poetically based rather than dependent on the telling of jokes. Even if the telling of jokes to an audience is used as a basic description of a comedian, the scope of performance variation in this verbal art form, that do apply to this study, will be curtailed in favour of a particular type of performance that is commonly identified with the label of stand-up comedian. This is because some verbally based performances that do involve the telling of jokes, also contain elements of other forms of comedy, as will be discussed later in the chapter. For the moment, it will suffice to say that significant differences in the range of performances in the form of live performance humour being studied, would need to be blatantly disregarded in order for the subject of the research to be definitively identified under the title of comedian.

Some performers that speak directly to an audience with the intention of making members laugh, are not easily recognised as joke-tellers and are certainly not

obvious joke-tellers like renowned stand-up comedians such as, Ken Dodd, Bernard Manning, Bob Monkhouse and Roy 'Chubby' Brown. John Sessions, for example, uses his skill as an actor and his ability to do voice impressions to give humorous performances that are described as 'monologues' rather than stand-up comedian.[3] These performances have a narrative structure and involve a number of characters that are all played by Sessions without the use of props.[4] His characters do use jokes, but they are not the same kind of jokes as those told by the professional stand-up comedians mentioned above. Mulkay (1988) argues that the jokes of a stand-up comedian are 'standardized' (p.8), which allows them to be passed around and told again and again as self-contained units of humour. He claims this standardisation refers to a familiarity with the complex organisation of the logic of implausibility contained within a joke as an example of humorous discourse, that enables its interpretation to be made on a different set of 'plausibility requirements' (p.17). These requirements reside within what Mulkay refers to as the 'humorous mode' and what Schaeffer (1981) refers to as the 'ludicrous context' (p.1), which is signalled by specific cues.

> The cueing of the ludicrous context alerts us to be ready to receive the incongruity with the widest possible latitude of association and permit the most idiosyncratic linkages or significances to be discovered between the associations polarized by the incongruity.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.18)

Hence a stand-up comedian can simply say, 'a man walked into a pub with an alligator under his arm . .' and the 'discursive display of opposing interpretive possibilities', which is a necessary feature of the 'humorous mode' (Mulkay, 1988, p.26), is set up within the narrative structure of the independent joke (Nash, 1985, pp.27-30; Chiaro 1992, pp.49-58). As a result, the same joke can be easily re-told by another comedian as an integral part of his or her joke-telling performance. However, the jokes used in a John Sessions performance do not have the same degree of standardisation as those used by a stand-up comedian and, therefore, resist re-telling by another performer. This is because they rely heavily on the detail of the narrative structure of the story, as told by the story-

teller (Sessions in character), to provide the necessary frame of reference for the jokes to work.

Paton (1988) acknowledges a difference in the joking discourse of different types of comedian. He refers to stand-up comedians like Les Dawson (his example) as 'conservative' comedians that perform with what he identifies as a 'category-routinised' joking frame (p.213). This means that the performance of this type of stand-up comedian is dependent upon common themes and stereotypes that an audience recognises as a part of everyday life and as legitimate subjects for humorous references to be made by a comedian. In the UK these frequently include sexist and familial themes such as 'wife' and 'mother-in-law' jokes, nationalistic themes such as 'Irish' jokes, ethnic themes such as 'Jewish' jokes, and racially based jokes (Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988; Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.), 1996). Paton claims the joking discourse of a 'conservative' comedian's joking frame is maintained because the frame has 'routinised or established behaviour cues or roles to follow through in joking activity' (p.216). This is in marked contrast with comedians like Spike Milligan (his example), who Paton defines as a 'radical' comedian with a 'setting-specific' joking frame (pp.216-17). This means that the jokes relate to a given situation with specific characters in a particular setting. Referring to Milligan's work on radio in 'The Goon Show' as a 'surreal form of satire' (p.217) rather than the work of a comedian, Paton goes on to contrast the 'radical' type with the 'conservative'. He points out that there are,

> social morality themes, story-lines or plots to comprehend and unravel, not to mention, as in the case of the aural humour of the Goons, the heavy emphasis on sound effects as integral non-verbal reinforcements of the comic language and situations portrayed.
>
> (Paton, in Powell and Paton, (eds.) 1988, p.217)

In other words, a lot of the humour of Milligan does not rest on the telling of jokes. Indeed, the humour of Milligan is entirely different in its performance from that of a conservative category-routinised stand-up comedian; and the

difference illustrates a weakness of the term comedian to differentiate between different types of performance within the form of humour being studied.

To use the term comedian to describe the work of humorous performers such as John Sessions, whose 'setting-specific joking frame is further reinforced by the story-telling format' (1988, p.217), therefore gives little indication of the distinctive features of his performance in either the content or the style of his humour. Indeed, there are similarities between Sessions and stand-up 'conservative' comedians such as Bob Monkhouse, Bernard Manning and Jimmy Tarbuck, for example, in that they are all solo performers, their performances typically do not use theatrical props or costume, they all go on stage and address an audience directly and they all have the intention of making the people in an audience laugh. However, there are significant differences in both the content and style of the performances of Sessions and the 'conservative' comedians mentioned, that would stretch their shared description of being a comedian into a more general definition of 'comic'.[5] But, as it is the difference in the types of humorous performance that is a central concern of this thesis, the use of the term comedian as a title to define the subject of the study needs to be examined closely. Hence, a failure of the term comedian to encompass differences in the form of humorous performances being considered, must be examined in order to assess whether the failure is a result of an overly determinate use of the basic joke-telling criterion attributed to the definition of comedian. If this were the case then it may still be able to function as a definition of the subject of the thesis, as it holds the characteristic of a comedian to act as a verbally based performer to recommend it. For example, because of the lack of standardisation of jokes, there is a case to be made that the humorous success of 'setting-specific' performers like John Sessions, is more dependent on the use of words than a stand-up comedian like Bob Monkhouse, because,

> Unlike a story or narrative, which would require embellishment ..., the standardized joke normally depends on the elimination of all material which is not strictly necessary in order to 'see the point' of the joke.[1]
>
> (Mulkay, 1988, p.13)

The success of Sessions rests on his linguistic ability to include rather than eliminate material that is not strictly necessary to 'see the point' of a joke. His performances include aesthetic features such as, 'opening and closing formulas, combined with textural features such as a distinct intonation or rhythm, as well as contextual conventions of a special time, place and audience, help define performance as aesthetic communication' (Fine and Haskell Speer, 1992, p.2). The way Sessions uses his pronounced bodily movements and facial expressions, as well as linguistic skills such as figurative language and parallelism, to send signals to an audience to identify messages of play or seriousness or melodrama or pathos, forms what Bateson conceptualises as 'metacommunication', which works as an interpretative frame to distinguish 'artistic verbal performance from other modes of communication' (cited in Fine and Haskell Speer, 1992, pp.4-5). In simple terms, an audience sees Sessions as presenting a different type of humorous performance to that of a stand-up comedian.

While the verbal requirement of different performances could be seen to hold the weakening definition of comedian as a subject title in place, the comparison between Dawson and Milligan, and Sessions and Monkhouse, illustrates that it is not because the verbal base of performance is specifically the telling of jokes. Although Paton uses Milligan as an example of a 'radical' comedian whose performance humour is very different from 'conservative' comedians, he is still classed as a comedian by Paton because his humour is produced using the definitive verbal criterion of a comedian. This verbal emphasis is overstated in the example of Milligan because it relates only to Milligan's work on radio as part of the Goon Show. Yet even here Paton acknowledges that a lot of the humour of the Goon shows was drawn essentially from non-verbal sources such as sound effects. Obviously radio dictates the aural character of humour, but a lot of the performances that are to be included as part of the subject of this research, rely as much on the visual as on the verbal.

One example of the importance of visual elements of humorous performance is the work of 'Amazing Johnathan'. The central element of the humour of his

performances is based on his skills as a magician. However, he uses these skills in a way that places the humour within the visual aspect of the competent execution of his magic, rather than in the professional incompetence and concurrent verbal joking that is the hallmark of performers such as the late Tommy Cooper, who are regarded as comedians because of the centrality of joke-telling to their performance. The verbal content of Amazing Johnathan's act is written as a narrative sub-text to supplement the visual emphasis of his performance and the joking material it contains would be completely unintelligible if the visual elements of the performance were removed. For example, at one point in the performance he suddenly stops in his tracks, looks at the audience with a bewildered expression and asks 'where am I?' He then performs a magic trick and says 'Wow, I'm back'. Not knowing what he did between the two verbal phrases makes them devoid of any humorous effect. But watching him walk over to a small table at the front of the stage, that has a clear plastic cylindrical container on it (about the size of a gallon canister), that is approximately three quarters full with a fine white powder - and deliver the first phrase (Where am I?) and then push one end of a tube the size of a bicycle pump against one of his nostrils and put the other end in the container and use it like a vacuum hose to siphon the entire contents up his nose - and deliver the second phrase (Wow I'm back), seals the humour of the words around the comical visual exaggeration of a particular form of drug taking (to 'snort' cocaine). In some parts of his act Johnathan uses the visual aspect of his magic without any additional verbal embellishment. In his last night show at the Acropolis, a marquee venue setting at the Edinburgh Festival (1993), the big finish to his act was a magic trick that was performed with only a musical accompaniment. Johnathan stood behind his small table at the front of the stage. On the table was a red silk scarf about a meter square. Under the scarf was an obvious ball shape about the size of a grapefruit. When the music of Richard Strauss's 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' began to play the ball shape began to move a little under the scarf and then it started to slowly bulge upwards lifting the scarf up from the table. It quickly became apparent from his exaggerated facial expressions and the calculated positioning of the scarf directly in front of his hips, that the lifting of

the scarf was obviously being done by the envious deformity of Johnathan's erection. As the music progressed so did the scarf through comically invested mannerisms of sexual intercourse. When the music reached its climax, Johnathan reached his; he went cross-eyed and the ball crashed from its furthest twitching extremity onto the table as a dead spent object. This was extremely humorously successful with the audience. It produced a degree of laughter that the silent screen clowns cited in Agee (1961) identified as the 'belly laugh', which is described as 'profound and protracted' (cited in Palmer, 1994, p.111).

The success of Amazing Johnathan's humour is undoubtedly dependent on the strong visual dimension of his performance. But there is a verbal component to his act that does have 'cue properties' to compound the humorous intent of his stage work. Here the 'cue properties' are the circumstances of the visual/magical features of the performance that 'help the single joke arouse mirth' (Palmer, 1994, p.108). The comic visual depiction of drug abuse mentioned earlier with Johnathan sticking a tube in the canister of white powder, allows the verbal phrase 'I'm back' to be the punchline of a joke about going on/returning from a drug trip. This joke, which is typical of the humour produced by Amazing Johnathan, is not based on the same verbal platform as either of the types of comedian identified by Paton (1988) as 'conservative' (Les Dawson) or 'radical' (Spike Milligan). So while the term 'radical' may apply because of the setting-specific joking frame, the term comedian becomes rather tenuous as a description of Amazing Johnathan, given the heightened visual and reduced verbal condition of his performance.

Implicit in the verbal criterion that is used to define the performance of a comedian, is that it is a spoken condition. Pollio and Edgerly (1976) compound this view when they split the term comedian into eight 'factors' that play a significant part in determining the kind of performance given by a comedian (in Chapman and Foot (eds.) 1976, pp.215-42). They accept a verbal base in each of these eight 'factors' and name factor III as the 'Verbal facility' factor. They give examples of comedians like Johnny Carson and Dick Cavett, who have all done

late-night talk shows, to show that the factor refers to the most verbally accomplished comedians (p.229). However, not all of the 'verbally accomplished' performers included in this study speak the words they use to generate the humour of their performances. Bob Downe, for example, sings the lyrics of well known popular songs from the 60's, 70's and 80's. There is no change or verbal addition to the original lyrics of any of the songs he sings (like 'Aquarius' and 'Fame') to make them funny. Rather, it is his stylistically excessively kitsch showbiz mannerisms exhibited in the way he dresses, sings and dances to the songs, that are the source of his humour. Although Downe makes the words used in the original composition of the lyrics of the songs a source of humour, they are not a verbal base to the humour of his performances because they were not written to be intentionally funny by the lyricist: they only become funny because of Bob Downe's particular presentation of them, which relies heavily on the visual aspect of his all singing all dancing performances.

The use of the term comedian to describe the subject of this study is stretched further into imprecision as a definition, as some of the performances to be considered do not have a verbal component upon which the humour of the act is predicated. Obviously mime artistes such as Marcel Marceau and George Carl could be given as examples of completely non-verbal humorous performances, as could a violin playing contortionist called Yogi Beard. A further example is the work of Ennio Marchetto, whose performances achieved considerable critical acclaim following his successes at the Edinburgh Festival during the mid-1990's.[6] Marchetto does impressions of famous people without speaking. He wears designed cardboard 'fronts' that fold and bend so that he can move them in the manner of the person they represent. He uses his face and arms to enliven the cardboard cut-out person he is wearing and this is the source of the humour. The only way I can briefly describe the nature of Marchetto's performance is to make an inadequate comparison with the large seaside postcard cartoons that have the face cut out so that people can go behind them and put their face into the cartoon and have their photograph taken to capture the comic effect. What Marchetto does on stage is intended to be funny and people go to see him

because they find his performances to be funny, but can he be described as a comedian? If he can, then on what basic criterion? And would the non-joke telling, non-verbal criterion be capable of supporting the use of the term comedian to define the range of humorous performances that are relevant to this research?

Intentionality

One criterion that could be put forward to define the performers included in the study as comedians, is the intention they all have for their performances to be humorous. The grounded intentionality of a performer to be funny may be seen as sufficient to support a more ubiquitous usage of the term comedian. As a definitive criterion intentionality does not prescribe any specific detail for a comedian's act, but it does appear to categorise a performance in that it will be judged by an audience entirely on the success or failure of its humour. Whether it involves telling jokes or telling stories, or whether it is a visual rather than a verbal performance, is of less importance to this definition of a comedian than the (proposed) basic criterion that they go on stage with the sole intention of making an audience laugh. On the basis of this criterion many of the humorous performances excluded by the term comedian because they are not verbally/joke based, could be included. Consequently, a performer called Eddy MacReddy could thus be described as a comedian, even though the humour of his act comes from a visual knock-about style that has him doing contortions on a trapeze swing, undressing in a big paper bag and finishing his act stark naked in profile to the audience, with a lighted fire cracker clenched between his buttocks, singing exuberantly Ethel Merman's 'There's no business like show business'.

However, when the definition of comedian is expanded using a criterion such as intentionality, in order to include the variety of performances that are relevant to this study, it is stretched into a vague statement that is open to cynical interpretation. For example, John Shuttleworth is routinely billed as a 'comedian', yet his performances are not based on telling standardised jokes to

an audience. He makes people laugh by playing tunes on a small unsophisticated electronic organ that could be bought from Woolworth's for about £100. The humour derives from the musical incongruencies contained within his compositions. Deep and meaningful lyrics are contrasted with a completely unsuitable but typically quirky sound produced by his cheap electronic organ. The organ has a bank of awful pre-set rhythm sections such as 'rumba' and 'samba' that can be played as backing to his melodies simply by pressing a button. Shuttleworth uses these rhythm sections to humorous effect by creating a musical juxtaposition within the structure of his songs; between a frantic rhythm section and an overstated melody for example. It is the obvious intention of Shuttleworth's performances to make people laugh and he does so from his music and from narrative strategies he has developed as a commentary on his life, work and songs, rather than from telling jokes, but he is still readily described and identified as a comedian.

Alfred Brendel is a classical pianist and is regarded as one of the finest exponents of Beethoven's work. He certainly does not tell jokes in his performances, but when he goes on stage to play Beethoven's symphony No. 6, it is his intention to make members of an audience laugh from being able to appreciate the humour that Beethoven intended to be extracted from the musical incongruencies contained within the composition. Brendel maintains that he regards his performance of this particular piece to be a failure if he does not make members of an audience laugh. Alfred Brendel has not and could not be described as a comedian and, therefore, the intentionality of a performance to generate laughter is not a sufficiently definitive criterion of a comedian. The example shows that it is necessary to take account of an audience's definition of a performance as comic, before it can claim a sufficiently substantive basis to describe the work as that of a comedian. Zijderveld (1983) claims that the comic effect of a joke depends more on the audience's definition of the situation than on the, 'intention of the person who tells the joke or on the content of the joke itself' (p.25). Part of this definition of the situation refers to the identity of the performer,

> in some cases the teller of the joke is a sort of humorous institution - professional comedians like Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx or Danny Kaye. No matter what they say or do, people will define their words, grimaces, gestures and acts as being funny.
>
> (Zijderveld, 1983, p.25)

The Occasion

Trying to adapt the use of the term comedian to accommodate the range of performances applicable to this research, can only stretch it beyond an acceptable usage which will therefore, render the term meaningless as a definitive title of the subject of this study. If a man who stands on a stage in front of an audience and does nothing other than have the contents of his stomach pumped out so that he can drink it again, is to be classified under the same definitive term as stand-up performers such as Ken Dodd or Ben Elton, who are themselves significantly different types of performers, then the term must allow for the evident scope of variation in performances that constitute the subject of this research. To persist with the term comedian as a working definition of the subject of the research, would either restrict the range of performances to be included in the research, to those performers that could support their definition as a comedian, or the term must be pulled into a vague and unfamiliar definition that will constantly require confirmation of its meaning throughout the thesis.

Ironically, although the term comedian is not sufficiently general to encompass the full range of performances to be included in the study, it also lacks the specificity to identify particular performances that will be included in the study. Hence, a number of alternative definitions have been developed to describe different humorous performances, of 'comedy actors', 'clowns', a 'satirist', a 'fool', a 'wit', a 'raconteur', or a 'fabulist' and this leaves room for doubt as to whether these variations of humorous performance are to be included in this research. At every point of deviation from the conservative stand-up joke-telling format that is historically associated with the description of a comedian, (See for example, Salutin, 1973, pp.159-68), a separate case would have to be made for

its inclusion in this study. For example, a reference to the work of poets like Henry Normal or John Hegley would have to be explained because they are not comedians. References to individual performers such as Rowan Atkinson would have to be defined as the work of a comedy actor rather than a comedian and then explained why they are being considered. To stop the thesis becoming bogged down in this kind of guarded explication of references to humorous performances, that would inevitably be caused by the prescriptive restriction imposed by the term comedian, it becomes necessary to decide whether the term has anything to offer as a definitive title to the subject of the thesis.

It is accepted that it is not possible to cover the full range of performances that apply to this study with any one term such as comedian, comedy actor, satirist etc. and it therefore becomes necessary to look for common features across the range of performances being studied, in order to build a viable definition of the subject of the thesis. One common feature is that each performance being considered forms part of an occasion that is expected to be humorous by those participating in it. As mentioned earlier, humour relies on cues to signal that the nature of the discourse should be taken humorously and not seriously.

> a comic performance is endowed with cue properties by its social nature; it is because it is defined (in advance of any particular performance) as being an occasion appropriate for humour that it is capable of acting as a cue for participants to define the activities they witness as being humorous and not of some other nature (offensive, childish, brutal, etc.).
>
> (Palmer, 1994, p.25)

All of the performances being considered in this study share this major cue. They each play a major part in forming an occasion where there is, 'the knowledge that the occasion in question is one in which humour is normal' and that this knowledge is sufficient to attract people to spend their money on admission charges so that they can participate in it (Palmer, 1994, p.106). Audience members may not know the exact detail of a performance but they know from pre-production features such as the reputation of the venue setting and the commercial notices for a performance, that humour is the emphasis of

the 'hilarious', 'black', 'off-beat', 'mad-cap', 'razor sharp', 'sick', 'comedy' performance. Particular occasions that are identified as humorous can accommodate particular performances from a part of the full range of the form of live performance humour this study is concerned with. This allows for performances that simply cannot be described using any of the aforementioned humorous performance epithets of, comedian, clown, comedy actor etc., to be included as part of the subject of the study, as they exist as performances as part of a humorous occasion. For example, 'Lifto' is a member of the Jim Rose Circus and the humour of his act is derived entirely from lifting ordinary objects in very extraordinary ways. A leather jacket on a wire coat-hanger is lifted once the hook of the hanger is inserted through a pierced hole in his tongue. Two breeze-blocks are lifted on their individual chains, once the hooks on the ends of the chains they are fastened to are inserted through his pierced nipples. For his big finish finale 'Lifto' moves behind a fine white cotton screen and is lit in silhouette as he uses his foreskin to lift a pair of household steam irons. While he is in a squatting position the irons, that are attached to one end of a chain, are clipped onto a metal ring pierced through his foreskin. He then proceeds to straighten his legs and stand upright with the irons suspended between them. Slowly at first, with his hands behind his head, he begins to make the irons swing in a gentle pendulous movement out towards the audience. As the motion becomes more pronounced the cotton screen is pulled away and the audience sees 'Lifto' in full frontal nudity swinging his steam irons with his penis. The reaction of the audience I participated in was notable in that there did not appear to be a collective similarity of response. There was a mixture of shrieks of laughter, groans of disbelief, empathetic noises to the perceived genital discomfort and a lot of chatter as friends and partners in the audience commented to each other on this perturbable sight. The cacophony increased as 'Lifto' began to develop his pelvic thrusts and swing his irons through an ever deepening inverted parabolic arc that reached an alarming extension. To the apparent relief of some people in the audience, the impossibly painful looking sweep of the steam irons began to subside and 'Lifto' deftly brought them to a

dangling halt before settling them back on to the stage with a bend of the knees. All of this was done in complete silence from the performer.

The obvious difference between the visual performance of 'Lifto' and a joke-telling performance of a stand-up comedian illustrates the importance of cue properties attached to a performance to define it as comic and to signal an occasion for humour. This is not to say that an occasion can produce humour; only that it can position an audience to have a frame of mind, or 'mind-set', that is geared to see things humorously. Apter and Smith (1976) refer to this 'mind-set' as 'para-telic' (cited in Palmer, 1994, p.106). Palmer states that the occasion of a 'comic performance' is a 'social label' that has obvious cue properties' that can induce this para-telic mind-set in an audience,

> Indeed, it is easy to observe in comedy performances that an audience which is sufficiently in tune with the performer will laugh at practically anything that can possibly be construed as having some incongruity built into it, such as a change of facial expression or tone of voice, sudden movement, etc.
>
> (Palmer, 1994, p.106)

Taking an audience's definition of the situation as an occasion for humour as a starting point, there is a foundation to a definition of the subject of this study, as all of the range of performances that apply to the study are included by definition of their perception as being integral to a humorous occasion. No performance in the range can be omitted because it does not fit into a definitive subject title, like comedian, that is quite simply not strong enough to support the full range of performances within the form of comedy they belong to and that is being studied. Therefore, in order to develop a definition of the subject form, basic elements of performance that audiences accept as an integral part of an occasion for humour must be identified. However, different forms of comedy can serve to contribute to an occasion for humour, consequently, the first task is to show what form is being studied by marking out the characteristic elements of the subject form from other forms of comedy that are not being considered. To say why these forms of comedy are not being considered in this thesis is, therefore, to state deductively what does constitute the form that is the subject of the thesis.

Forms of comedy

Neale and Krutnik (1990) make the case that comedy cannot be defined by any single criterion, even on the criterion of laughter (p.10). They argue that comedy has a generic kinship with melodrama in that it often conforms to the narrative characteristics of drama. This is why theatrically based theories of comedy along with neo-classical theories, which distinguish between 'high' and 'low' comedy, emphasise 'the importance of narrative considerations in general and the criterion of laughter specifically' (1990, p.14). Non-narrative forms of comedy, such as comedians and double-acts whose work rests on the telling of jokes, gags and one-liners and which neo-classical theory regards as low comedy, have laughter as their definitive criterion because they do not have the essential preceding narrative context of high comedy to support a plot or happy ending. The initial specification of the range of comedy into narrative and non-narrative forms, will be used as a starting point to define the form being studied. Hence, a title may be seen to be incomplete if it does not give either a clear indication of the range of melodramatic narrative forms that can be classed as the subject of the thesis, or any indication as to whether or not any or all of these forms are to be considered within the scope of this research.

The use of 'live performance humour' as a title would thus require the addition of 'non-narrative' in order to make clear the subject of the research. But to do this would again be restrictive and misleading because some of the types of live performance humour being considered do include narrative strategies in the form of a Victoria Wood character monologue, for example, or a John Sessions 'Likely Story', a Fast Show sketch or a 'Wild Bunch' mini play with up to five characters and a plot. So once again, the definitive title of the research would have to be expanded to include these forms of narrative in live performances that do not correspond to the definitive criteria of 'high' comedy given above. This is to say that narrative conventions are used by 'low' comedy for the purpose of generating laughter, rather than for the purpose of providing a company of actors with characters to develop within the structure of a plot typified by a happy

ending (Charney, 1978; Grote, 1983, pp.18-19, p.50; Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp.10-15).

The point of distinction between the form of live performance humour being considered here and various other forms of comedy, is, therefore, blurred because they cannot be neatly separated on the basis of narrative or non-narrative criteria. The definition of the research subject under the title of live performance humour rests on the designation of a particular form of comedy that can not be considered within the context of melodramatic narrative forms used in film, television or radio, because of the obvious difference in the conditions of production and the nature of the audience to a performance. Therefore, in order to develop a clear indication of the form of live performance humour that is being studied, detail will be given on specific patterns and conventions that characterise the melodramatic narrative forms that are readily associated with an identified form of live performance humour that does not apply to this study. For example, pantomime can be classified as a narrative form of live performance humour, as indeed can farce, comedy of manners, or Theatre of the Absurd (Milner Davis, 1978, pp.94-9), yet these forms can not be regarded as similar in either the content or the style of performance, or the 'mode' of comedy they have as their characteristic.[7] They can be identified as distinct forms of comedy under their different labels given above, despite variations within the genre identified (Nelson, 1990, chapter two). Farce, for example, has 'mechanical manipulations of plot and character' and 'more than any other comic forms, depends upon the direct, dramatic enactment of its jokes and humiliations' (Milner Davis, 1978, pp.23-24). The structure of farce has strict rules built into it, in the stylisation of acting and depersonalisation of character, which govern the way it balances the 'eternal comic conflict between the forces of conventional authority and the forces of rebellion'(ibid, p.24).

> If the conflict is allowed to escape its stylized and care-free 'play-frame', farce becomes cynical, a piece of black, absurdist comedy. If it is provided with characters who are self-conscious about the wrongs they inflict and suffer, farce becomes pathetic, a tragical romance, which can only be recalled to comedy by an unlooked-for happy ending.
>
> (Milner Davis, 1978, p.24)

Farce, like each of the other different genres identified and recognised as narrative forms of comedy, has generic criteria that allows it to be described using the restricted notion of comedy that rests on the use of the indefinite article - 'a'. Neale and Krutnik (1990) make the case that not all forms of comedy can be described as 'a' comedy (p.16). They argue that while it is usually non-narrative forms that can not carry the indefinite article, there are some narrative forms that 'lack a conventional narrative structure, as well as a conventional institutional base', that are also unable to be described as 'a' comedy (p.16). To illustrate these conventions that are present in the forms of live performance that meet with the description of 'a' comedy, will provide a dividing line that identifies the form of comedy being studied here as a form in which no performance can be described as 'a' comedy.

The singularly most important convention appertaining to 'a' comedy is the relationship between funniness and narrative. In 'a' comedy the narrative structure of the text may be such that the,

> funniness is subordinated to some other meaning, or at least interwoven with it in a way that makes the non-funny meaning at least as important as the process of mirth creation.
>
> (Palmer, 1994, p.120)

The form of comedy under consideration in this thesis, however, does not allow funniness to be subordinated to some other meaning. Although stand-up comedians like Ben Elton and Jo Brand are well known for the serious political convictions they hold and refer to in the context of their performances, they cannot make these references at the expense of the funniness of a performance. All of the performers being included in this research, use the phrase, 'to die the death', which means that they have failed in their performance to make an audience laugh for whatever reason. The unequivocal sentiment of the phrase gives a strong and clear indication that such failure is the ultimate price for a performer to pay if the funniness of their performance is not realised. Hence, all of the performances within the form being considered share the definition of the comic, in that meaning is subordinated to the production of laughter and in that

they do not have the potential of 'a' comedy to subordinate funniness to some other meaning (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p.18).

Palmer (1994) makes a distinction between farce and comedy stating that 'farce is a form where everything is subordinated to laughter production' (p.120). However, the definitive criteria of the genre of farce given above, with its use of narrative conventions of character and plot, does align the form with other forms that can be aesthetically described as 'a' comedy. Indeed, Palmer recognises,

> that the distinction between farce and comedy also has a social value: farce is part of 'popular' or 'mass' culture (depending upon the period under discussion); comedy readily forms part of 'culture' in the sense of 'national', 'high' or canonical culture.
>
> (Palmer, 1994, p.120)

The distinction is a result of a hierarchical genre system that was imposed using the seventeenth-century conceptions of literature and theatre, that classified comedy as a 'low' form because it 'was concerned with the lives of the common people and could therefore involve undignified actions' (Palmer, 1987, pp.162-7). Farce was recognised as a very base form of pleasure 'for the mob to gaze at for their two-pence' (Dryden, cited in Palmer, 1994, p.123). The socio-cultural distinction between farce and comedy may be seen to exacerbate the difference between them regarding the primacy placed on laughter production, but it does not equate farce with the performances that are the subject of this thesis. This is because there remains a sufficiently identifiable structure to farce that is definitive of the genre, and this enables it to be distinguished from performances in the form being studied that do comply with narrative conventions and do subordinate all else to the production of laughter, such as a revue or improvisational sketch.[8]

Live performance humour as a form of comedy

It has been argued that because of the wide variety of performances within the form being studied, there is an implicit generality that resists any single term

being used as a title to define the form. Terms like 'comedian' are only capable of defining some of the performances in the range, and while this definition may be substantive with regard to verbal joke-telling performances, it is not substantive for the range as a whole and is, therefore, inapplicable as a definitive title to the subject of the thesis. In order to provide such a title, it is necessary to accept that there is an inherent level of generality set by the variety of performances in the subject form and that a definitive title must reflect this. However, it is a level of generality that must be sufficiently circumspect to provide the requisite definition of the subject. Hence, to use a reference to comedy, even in live performance, is too general because it is a term that covers a wide variety of generic forms that are each demanding of specific and detailed analysis.

The apparent generality of live performance humour as a title is a strength insofar as it signifies that there are more performances under consideration than those ascribed to the title of comedian. Live performance humour is put forward as a title that can not only accommodate the full range of the subject form, but can also distinguish a purposefully staged performance as an integral part of an occasion for humour in a particular venue setting, as something that is different from humour as a social performance by a social actor in 'the living natural situation',

> In the living natural situation, the comic event and its attendant laughter are usually incidental to other ongoing activities while in the created theatrical setting the comic event and its attendant laughter are brought about by the antics of specially trained performers.
>
> (Pollio and Edgerly, 1976, p.216)

The use of the word 'performance' in the title, therefore relates to a formalised discursive exchange that disrupts the dialogic expectancy in the living natural situation where participants can be both listener and speaker. In formal comic performance there is an 'asymmetry of access to the means of communication [that] distinguishes audience from performer' (Palmer, 1994, p.111). This is to say that an audience is the listener and a performer is the speaker. This is

compounded by the essential features of staged performance that allow a performance to become performative: namely, 'the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings whose demonstration of their skills is the performance' (Carlson, 1996, p.3). Furthermore, a performance is recognised as a construction that is skilfully put to an audience as a representation of events that are not inherently funny in real life. Purdie (1993) maintains that a performance operates as a 'signifying structure, within which the performers' actions make sense of events which may be funny' (p.15).

In conjunction with formalised performance rather than 'naturally occurring wit' in everyday social situations, the word 'live' in the title refers to the effect an audience has on a performance as a discursive exchange,

> audiences have their own inner dynamics .... such dynamics are often as important as the material used by a particular performer in bringing about a desired artistic effect.
>
> (Pollio and Edgerly, 1976, p.239)

The word 'live' is used to give an indication that in the setting in which a performance takes place, there is a special relationship between an audience and a performer at the moment of the performance. Pollio and Edgerly (1976) make the claim that 'the stand-up comic needs, and uses, audience feedback' more than any other performer (p.239). They recognise the peculiarity of the directness of address between a comedian and an audience; and it is a directness that has historically characterised the form of the comic sketch since the days of music hall. Rutherford (1986) makes the case for the 'special quality of relationship' between comic performer and audience in the music hall,

> in music hall and variety, it is the audience's 'complexity of response' that is so vital to the way the performer addresses and handles them.[32]
>
> (Rutherford, cited in Bratton (ed.) 1986, p.138)

It is a characteristic of the form of comedy that is the subject of the thesis to address an audience directly, and so the 'complexity of response' from an audience remains vital as a definitive criterion of the form being studied. As

such, it is a point of differentiation from the other forms of comedy identified above. The strictures of character dialogue and plot that are essential to the narrative structure of each of those particular forms, reduces the directness of address to an audience to a lesser but variable degree. Pantomime, for example, with its 'He's behind you!' shouts that are actively solicited by performers from members of an audience, is more directed to an audience, while the intricacies of 'high' comedy, such as an Alan Ayckbourn play, do not usually provide for characters to address members of an audience directly. High comedy, in much the same way as its purist example of Shakespearean comedy, is often presented as illusionist theatre where the very existence of an audience is not acknowledged by the players on stage. Here the audience is described as composing the 'fourth wall',

> the other three walls forming a three-dimensional picture in which the actor moved, his face made up to benefit from coloured spot-lights and footlights, which, together with the proscenium arch, created a Rubicon to exclude the audience from the world of moving pictures. No sign was ever given that actors or characters were aware of the audience's presence.
>
> (Hayman, 1979, p.133)

The use of the word 'live' in the title, therefore relates to the presence of an audience to a performance as part of the 'agency' in the discursive exchange that is involved in all joking (Purdie, 1993, p.5). In the particular context of this study it refers to individuals identifying themselves as part of an audience that is part of an occasion in which humour is not only permissible but desirable, specifically because of a formalised staged performance.

The third word in the title, 'humour', which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the quality of being funny', is used here because it is a precise reference to the conceptual activity involved in finding things funny (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p.66). It refers to a discursive exchange which involves a teller and a process of negotiation whereby audience members make sense of the humorous meaning (Purdie, 1993, introduction). This is different from the definition of the word 'comic'. Freud, in 'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious', does not see that 'the comic' requires a teller. He sees 'the

comic' is more in line with funny events rather than funny words (cited in Purdie, 1993, p.6). Neale and Krutnik (1990) argue jokes 'explicitly embody the formal features of humour' (p.65).

> For Freud a joke is *made* (constructed, produced); it exists only in utterance; and its immediate material is language and signs. The comic, by contrast is *witnessed* (discovered, observed). It can exist, beyond the realms of formal utterances, in situations encountered in everyday life. . . . These situations, however, are not *constituted* in discourse, nor are they uttered by an agent of address.
>
> (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p.72)

This thesis is concerned with a form of comedy that exists only in formal performance in that it does have an audience as an agent of address and it is discursive in its negotiation and exchange of humorous meaning. To use the word 'comic' to title the thesis as 'live comic performance' is regarded as definitively inferior to the chosen title, 'live performance humour', because there is the possibility that the word 'comic' could stretch the definition of the form into a vague statement about an audience finding a performance to be a funny event. For example, an audience may find a singer funny who tries to sound like Elvis Presley, but on stage is the singer being ridiculed and laughed at as a poor singer, rather than a comedian being humorously appreciated as a good comical mimic? This example is based on performances given in a public house called The Victoria Park in South Tyneside in the North-East of England. In this public house, on a given night of the week, four people with obvious learning disabilities are encouraged to go on stage and 'perform'. One after another they are ushered up onto the stage to perform to a packed house. A Down's syndrome male wearing a shiny gold Elvis in Las Vegas costume sings Elvis songs. A Down's syndrome female is dressed to go on stage as his beautiful wife Priscilla. All of the performers take to the stage and sing and dance with all heart and sincerity to an audience of young night club goers, who shriek with a heartless laughter that is vouchsafed as such by the intensity it reaches when one of the performers uncontrollably urinates himself on stage. Therein lies a definition of the comic but never one of humour.

The use of the word 'humour' also carries sociological implications following the work of Fox (1990); Mulkay (1988); Palmer (1987, 1994); Powell and Paton (eds.) (1988); Paton, Powell and Wagg, (1996); Zijderveld (1983). This is to say that humour must be understood within the context of the relevant cultural and social networks. Such writers accept Douglas's observation that a joke can only exist as a joke when it is perceived and permitted as a joke and it is allowed to be funny (Douglas, 1968, p.366). The word humour is therefore used in the title to give both a clear indication of a particular form of comedy that is being studied and the implication that the form will be studied with a consideration of the essential sociological significance of the subject.

Conclusion

To identify the particular form of comedy that is the subject of this thesis, requires a title that can at once designate the form and at the same time accommodate the range of performances that characterise the form. Hence, the aim of this first chapter has been to provide a title that can, in effect, define the subject of the study. Some prospective titles were found to be too narrow in the scope of performances they could legitimately refer to - this was found to be the case with the term comedian - and some titles were found to be too general, as was the case when live performances were referred to using a definition of 'the comic'.

Live performance humour is accepted as a title for the thesis because it has a balance between the generality that is required to cover the complete range of performances within the form being considered; and the specificity that is needed to identify performance criteria that characterise and distinguish the form from other forms of comedy. Just as other forms are each recognised and named as farce or pantomime etc., by certain features given to them by a particular set of established performative properties that characterise it and identify it as a form, the subject form of the thesis is put forward as having a particular set of

established performative properties that characterise it and identify it as a form that ranges from Bernard Manning's mouth to Lifto's foreskin.

Chapter Two

The aim of this chapter is to establish a classification of performances to 'type' categories that can provide an informative reference location for different performances making up the form of live performance humour that is the subject of this thesis. It is because of practical problems imposed by the number and diversity of performances contained within the form, that the development of a system of classification is deemed necessary. For example, it is simply not possible for me to observe and document each and every individual performance in order to demonstrate the extensive variation of live performance humour. However, as the classification of performances to type categories is designed to allow for references to a particular performance to be made on the grounds of it being identified as belonging to a designated 'type', the extensive variation of the form can be demonstrated without the need for every individual performance to be detailed. The use of the type category is intended to facilitate reference to differences in the form of live performance humour, in much the same way as the term genre is used to facilitate descriptions of differences in the filmic form.[1] Further, the type categories established in this chapter will be used in the next chapter as sampling frames from which a representative selection of performances will be detailed. This is to illustrate the scope of performances within a particular type and, with all of the types being considered, the scope of the complete range of the form will be documented as a result. This will complete a cumulative definition of the form of live performance humour that is the subject of this thesis, by defining the form precisely in terms of the range and diversity of actual performances contained within it. There are three type categories to be established in the chapter and they will be identified as, 'mainstream', 'circuit' and 'extreme'.

Type setting

To work effectively as sampling frames, each type must be defined in terms of it being a demonstrably clear classification of performances that can support the inclusion of each performance identified with it. However, as live performance humour is shown in chapter one not to be based emphatically on the kinds of performance that can be easily segregated into distinctively conventionalised types, such as clowns, mime or slapstick, it becomes more difficult to distinguish different types of performance that are not based on conventionalised definitions of generic performance criteria. This is to say, that although a large part of the range of live performance humour is commonly referred to using conventionalised type labels, such as 'comedian' or 'stand-up', the labels are not sufficiently definitive to classify different types of comedian or stand-up performance. Conventionalised types with titles such as comedian or stand-up, therefore fail to provide the intended functional usage of a titled type in this thesis, which is to indicate substantive differences between stand-up performances (that will be detailed in chapter three) as diverse as Roy 'Chubby' Brown and Henry Normal, or Tom O'Connor and The Bastard Son of Tommy Cooper. Hence, for a type classification of performances to work effectively in the context of this thesis, the definitive base of a type must adequately reflect the detail of what actually constitutes 'typical' performances and it must have a sufficiently descriptive and delimiting title to show this.

To establish each type on the basis of the detail of a particular feature of performance, such as content material or style of presentation, is fraught with difficulty. First, recording the detail of either the content or the style of a performance engenders a definitive precision that will greatly increase the number of types that would be required to cover the full range of performances in the form. This is because both content and style features of a performance can be defined on numerous levels. Content, for example, can be defined as subject material, artistic status[2] and joking structure (stories, narrative, jokes, gags) and each level can be sub-divided to produce an even greater precision from which to

specify the content feature of a performance. For example, subject material identified as 'sexual' can be specified as being either 'blue' or 'risqué' on one level, or either sexist or politically incorrect on another. Similarly, material classified as 'political' can be identified in terms of having a Left Wing or a Right Wing bias, or as satirical, or in terms of political (in)correctness. Recognising that a sub-division of subject material can be formed on each of the different joking structures of a performance, introduces the potential for a myriad of highly specific content based types to be developed to cover the range of the form completely.

The potential for the number of type categories to increase as a result of detailing content based differences between performances, also exists for a consideration of style as a feature of performance. Indeed, a consideration of stylistic features of performance necessarily involves a consideration of content. For example, two performances located to a type on content based similarities of joking structure, artistic status and subject material, can be completely different stylistically. For example, both Jasper Carrott and Lee Evans have a 'radical' artistic status, a joking structure that weaves a mixture of recounted stories, gags and one-liners and a subject material that is topical, politically correct and based on keen observations of everyday life. But Carrott's performance is in the style of an ascorbic laid-back cynic who sits in an easy slouch on a high bar stool in the centre of the stage with his arms folded. He does get agitated and expressively animated at times with flailing arms and histrionics, but always resumes his usual casual disposition. This is in stark contrast to Lee Evans, whose performances are based on a highly visual and dynamic style that involves extreme physical contortions of his face and body and a lot of movement around the stage. Whereas Carrott tells stories, Evans comically and energetically acts them out. Hence, from a consideration of style as a feature of performance, it is not possible to regard these two performances as being of the same type.

To engage in a critical evaluation of whether the content or the style feature of performance is more important to live performance humour, in order to decide

upon which to use as the basis for a system of classification, is deemed to be of no value here. It is not accepted that one feature could be established as being essentially more important than the other to the success of performances in the form. Even the most unerringly deadpan performers like Steven Wright, who drones his dour deep-voiced monotone speech into a microphone pressed to his lifeless face, utilise the style feature of (minimal) facial expression to performative advantage. Wright's fatalistically morose hangdog expression facilitates humour from the referent it provides for the juxtaposition of stylistic physical demeanour and simple content references to him feeling 'happy' or 'being beside himself with excitement'. These references would fail in their humorous import without the stylistic element of the performance to support them. Further, while stylistic features such as facial expression are a vital element in any humorous performance, in that they are used to punctuate and accentuate the humorous impact of content material, they can also function independently as a source of humour. For example, the exaggerated facial contortions Lee Evans uses to pull funny faces is recognised as a specific form of visual comic art known as 'gurning'.

> In performance, the aesthetic dimension comes to the fore as performers accept responsibility not only for what they do, but also for how they do it. The audience of a performance maintains a dual focus, attending to what is said and done, and how it is accomplished.[3]
>
> (Fine and Haskell Speer, 1992, p.2)

Style is acknowledged as a highly significant feature of performance; and to use it as the basis for type categorisations would increase the number of types to be established, as content must be considered in order to account for stylistically different performances and style must be considered in relation to performances with content similarities. Therefore, even if it were possible to establish content or style as the most important feature of live performance humour, it is not accepted that either feature could provide a definitive base to a classificatory type category.

Stemming from a recognition of the problems imposed by attempting to establish type categories on the basis of a particular feature of performance, is the suggestion that a specific combination of performance features could be used to define the basis for a type. However, this is also fraught with difficulty, as the features of content and style afford an infinite degree of subtlety to an artiste to adapt and adjust them to produce a particular performance. The difficulty here arises from the eclectic nature of humour to be derived from an exceptionally wide variety of performance permutations of pattern/form/style/content. Indeed, the range and diversity of performances in the form of live performance humour attest to this. This means there is enough scope for 'comedians' or 'stand-up' performers to do very little to substantively inflect a specific combination of performance features to present a different 'type' of act. Consequently, to use each identifiable combination of content and style features of performance as the basis for a type, would once again produce a large number of types to be recorded.

A major problem with setting performances to a type based on a specific combination of features of performance, is that apparent similarities are taken to recommend performances to conventionalised types, such as comedian for example, while less perceptible but equally substantial differences may exist in the performances to indicate that they are not the same type. For example, Jo Brand and Ellie Laine are two female comedians who each do a stand-up act that involves them presenting a measured and confidently reassured style. They both appear on stage as 'themselves', as 'personalized professionals ... as people whose profession is comic performing' (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p.191), rather than an assumed character or comic persona. The content material of both is sexual in that it is sexually explicit, and it involves sexual politics; predominantly in berating men. They both tell jokes and gags and use expletives as assertive punctuation. They both often push to the limit of bad taste sufficiently to provoke audiences to exhibit the accustomed mannerisms of smiling grimaces and groans that serve as the appropriate responses to a 'sick' joke (Ellis in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.), 1996; Morrow, 1987; Dundes,

1987). These two performers do have content and stylistic similarities that could be used to locate them in a conventionalised 'comedian/comedienne' or 'stand-up' type category. However, a category that included these two performers would necessarily be superficial, given that they do not perform the same type of acts, they are not commonly perceived as being the same type of performers and their allocation to a type would be so simplistic as to render the type exceptionally vague, extremely difficult to define and therefore typologically useless.

To explain, Brand is short and fat and dresses in a gender neutral fashion wearing red Doctor Martin boots, baggy black trousers and baggy black Tee-shirts. She stylistically exploits her sexually unappealing physical appearance in a manner that enables her to use joking references about men and sexual encounters, from the position of 'trying to get a shag from a bloke'. Laine, who is tall, slim and blonde, and who wears clothes designed to accentuate and reveal her stereotypically sexually curvaceous female form, also stylistically exploits her physical appearance to underpin sexual joking material. However, she develops her content material from the position of 'blokes trying to get a shag from her' and elevates herself to a position of superiority on the basis of her physicality, rather than an intellectual sexual political position, as that of Brand, to be in control of situations involving men and sexual encounters. The sexual subject material of the content feature of the two performances is, therefore, very different in its emphasis and this significantly affects the type of performance they are responsible for and the nature of the humour they generate. To maximise the potential of their type of performance to be successful, these two performers play to different audiences in different venue settings, which are obviously considered to be more conducive to the successfulness of the type of performance. For example, Brand performs regularly at the Edinburgh Festival and Laine does not, while Laine performs regularly in working men's clubs and Brand does not. In short, these two performers are responsible for two different types of performances that appeal to different audiences in different venue

settings and a worthwhile system of type classification of performances must be able to take account of such differences.

Similarly, any attempt to support a definitive type category on the basis of a common perception of a conventionalised particularity of performances, is just as likely to be defeasibly vague. For example, some comedians are conventionally specified as 'impressionists' because they have the ability to imitate primarily the different sound qualities of other peoples' voices and the characteristic mannerisms of the person the voice impression relates to. Impressionists may also use costume and props, such as spectacles, wigs and make-up to achieve a visual likeness to the person who is the subject of an impression. However, to base a type of live performance humour on 'impressionists' would have severe limitations. As a type category it would not be able to differentiate between extremely diverse performances of impressionists like Rory Bremner, whose highly satirical content and quick-fire style of verbal dexterity voiced through rapidly changing impressions, has nothing in common with the work of performers such as Freddie Starr or Eddie Large. Freddie Starr is a performer who 'does' an impersonation of Elvis, and Eddie Large is a performer who 'does' impressions of John Wayne and Deputy Dawg as part of a double act with his partner Sid Little. There is little common ground between impressionists like Alistair McGowan or Simon Lipson who amuse audiences because they have the studiously practised skills to 'be' other individuals; and performers like Russ Abbot who give comic impressions of cultural stereotypes such as a 1950's Teddy Boy called 'Vince Prince' and a kilted thuggish working class Scottish male called 'See-you Jimmy'.

Further difficulties with a type category based on impressionists are highlighted when performers such as Danny La Rue, Lily Savage and Dame Edna Everage are considered. These are male performers who perform as women and whose performances as female impersonators are significantly different from any of the artistes mentioned above in association with an impressionist type category. Yet even to locate the performances of female impersonators together as a type on

the basis of the predominantly defining characteristic of a man being dressed relatively convincingly as a woman - and performances relying entirely on being able to perform as a female performer on stage - is to overlook or deny substantive differences between them for the more apparent similarities (Holt Sawyer, 1987). In the work of female impersonators there are substantial differences in both content and style features of performance to undermine a type category being based definitively on 'female impersonators'. For example, Danny La Rue's performance is a highly polished glitz and glamour costume spectacular. Members of his audience are invited to admire the lavish Music Hall couture of (his) resplendent gowns that sparkle with beads and sequins and their overstated flamboyance that is headed by copious plumes of ostrich feathers. He sings to well orchestrated songs, such as 'On Mother Kelly's Doorstep', that complement the Music Hall/pre-War period of his grandiose costume and he confines the bawdiness of his content material to a traditionally familiar saucy sea-side postcard level of double entendre typified by the Carry On films. He delivers this material in a style of projected female sensuality, which he achieves by using the tonal quality of his voice, a subtle inflection of well-spoken words, mannerisms and movement, and, more obviously, his costume dress, wigs and make-up. Audiences accept Danny La Rue's female performance persona as that of a worldly wise Music Hall actress, but who has the social grace and sophistication to exploit her sexuality and existing sexual mores, while maintaining her status as a 'lady'.

The performance work of Danny La Rue is markedly different from other female impersonators working as 'drag acts', who use more explicitly sexual material and who can develop 'blue' subject material to audiences in venue settings, such as public houses and working men's clubs, that he (La Rue) does not perform in. Indeed, some female impersonators perform exclusively as blue drag acts and therefore have little in common with the content feature of the performances of Danny La Rue. There is also a significant difference between Danny La Rue and female impersonators like Barry Humphreys or Paul O'Grady, who invent one particular female character for themselves - Dame Edna Everage and Lily Savage

respectively - and become that character entirely for the purpose of humorous performance. They adopt the constructed individual identity of the female character they have created and base the performance on the character completely. This leads to the performer being known by the name of the female persona, which is billed in the pre-production of the performance, rather than their real (male) name. Audiences in the UK are familiar with the work of Lily Savage, who is the female incarnate of Paul O'Grady, yet despite the popularity of this performer from television exposure, there is little reference to the name of the man who performs as Lily Savage. This is not the case with Danny La Rue. He is always billed as Danny La Rue and when he is not in performance and appears on television being interviewed, he is usually dressed as a man. When O'Grady is interviewed in the media he usually appears as Lily Savage. There are also significant differences in both the content and the style features of these performances, which would necessarily be ignored if they were located together in a type formed simply on the basis of performances given by men impersonating women. Such a simple determinate criterion would fail to acknowledge essential content and stylistic feature differences between the saucily nostalgic performances of Danny La Rue and the contemporary hard-nosed streetwise shoplifting survivor that is the total Lily Savage persona. Hence, commonly used conventionalised type labels, such as 'impressionist' and 'female impersonator', which may appear to identify a type of performance, are to be rejected here. They are considered to be incapable of supporting a type frame as they do not illustrate substantive similarities (and therefore differences) between performances that would identify them as belonging to a particular and definitive type category.

To summarise, common descriptions and conventionalised type titles of performances, such as 'impressionist', 'female impersonator', 'comedian' or 'stand-up', are to be rejected here because they are not sufficiently specific to substantively define a type category. Further, types based on the detail of specific content or style features, or on a particular combination of them that applies distinctively to some 'comedians', 'impressionists' or 'female

impersonators' and not others, is also to be rejected, as this would render the type they represent to be so specific as to include only a small number of performances that could be classified as 'typical'. The result of this would be to defeat the intended organisational purpose of the type categorisation to this thesis, which is to classify differences in the range of live performance humour, as the list of types would be too expansive and numerous to work effectively.

In order for type categories to work effectively, each type will be established on an essential definitive theme that is multifariously displayed in the performances contained within it and not on particular features of performance, or combinations of features. The theme of each type will refer primarily to a combination of factors that provide a performance with the potential to be successful. This is to say that individual social and physical factors comprising the social context of a performance (which will be detailed in chapter four) will be considered as essential constituent elements of the theme of a type. Consequently, venue setting, audience and performer reputation will be considered as essential elements to the development of a type. For example, a venue setting in which a performance takes place will be shown to have a significant influence on audience expectations of a performance to be a particular type of performance; and audience expectations formed on the image or reputation of a performer, or a venue setting, or both, will be shown to be highly significant to the (un)successfulness of a performance. Hence, the location of a performance to a type will be based upon a 'typically' common theme that can inform an audience about the nature of the humour of a performance and how it is to be appreciated in terms of the type of live performance humour it is.

The three type titles of 'mainstream', 'circuit' and 'extreme', are designed to indicate substantive thematic differences that have a significant bearing on the (un)successfulness of different types of live performance humour. The thematic base of this categorisation of performances is intended to allow for performances that do share obvious similarities in terms of content and style features, to be

acknowledged as being significantly different types of performance and located accordingly. For example, Jo Brand and Ellie Laine, as two female stand-up comedians, have been shown to have common features of performance, yet could not be usefully classified as being the same type of performers. The theme of Laine's performance places her in the mainstream type, while the theme of Brand's places her in the circuit type. This is to say they are not the same type of 'comedian' because they hold their successful performance appeal predominantly with different audiences in different venue settings.

By choosing not to base the three type categories on a specific feature (or combination of features) of performance, in favour of the more general aspect of a thematic structure that refers to the location of performances in the social context of a venue setting, there may appear to be room to question whether significant differences in the detail of the content or the style of different performances allocated to a type may be overlooked. This, however, is not accepted as a legitimate base for criticism of the type categories. The argument put forward here, is that the thematic base of each type enables the specific detail of a performance to be more fully appreciated rather than overlooked. For example, a simple content analysis of one performer's subject material on a particular issue such as sex, race, gender, domesticity or politics, for example, may be seen to characterise the content of the performance as belonging to a designated type. However, it is only by taking account of the broader social context of the performance that the actual content of the joking material can be adequately understood. This can mean that the same joking material that could be construed as sexist or racist when it is used by a mainstream performer, may be used by a circuit performer to highlight sexist or racist attitudes. For example, many circuit type performers use the same words and phrases that are deemed sexist when associated with mainstream artistes - words such as 'slapper', 'slag', 'tart' and 'bitch' and develop content material that could be considered equally sexist if used by a mainstream performer, but the charge of sexism is dissipated as a lampooning exercise as a consequence of audience expectations and venue setting location of the performance as being that of a circuit type. Indeed, the

disparaging use of such reviled mainstream terms is often used to extol the kudos of a circuit performer by signalling their credibility to a circuit audience to have such joking references accepted as humorous rather than offensive. This is to say, that in order to appreciate specific differences in the emphasis of the effective joking content of such similar subject material, an audience must be able to recognise the theme of a performance. This is an extremely important point to the way in which the type categories have been developed in the thesis. It is the thematic base of the types that enables them to make allowance for the kind of anomalies highlighted above; that performances can be recognised as being essentially different and therefore allocated to different types despite having content and stylistic similarities. Conversely, it is the theme of a type that enables performances to be included in a type even though they may appear to have very little content or style features in common.

Mainstream type

Included in this type is one of the most familiar and enduring images of live performance humour in the late 20th Century: The image of the quintessential stand-up comedian. It is an image of a smartly dressed lone male standing deliberately at ease on a spot-lighted stage, with a microphone in one hand and the thumb and forefinger of the other pressed into a waistcoat fob pocket, telling jokes directly to an audience. The hand may leave the fob pocket to adjust a bow-tie or a mic-stand while the audience is laughing, but the professional ease of posture returns as soon as he starts to crack the next joke, gag or one-liner in a set routine of jokes, gags and one-liners (Pollio and Edgerly in Chapman and Foot (eds.), 1976). While this is an image that may be readily associated with the mainstream type title, it does not, however, correspond to a realistic picture of performances comprising the type. The mainstream type, like each of the types, contains a rich diversity of performances, which refutes a conventionalised or common sense reading of the title as indicative of a category that is principally composed of stand-up bow-tie and tuxedo comedians.

The defining thematic structure of the mainstream type is the successfulness of live performance humour that is based essentially on an uncritical acceptance of dominant cultural stereotypes as legitimate and 'traditional' joking material. It is joking material that exploits stereotypical images of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and nationality for example, to establish common 'butts' of jokes. A mainstream performance works from a position of superiority which is not concerned to offer content material that is designed to challenge dominant ideological forms (Boston, 1974; Gruner, 1978; Bergson, in Zijderveld, 1983; Hobbes, in McGhee and Duffey, 1983; Zillman, 1983). Again, to refer to the work of Jo Brand and Ellie Laine, Brand's physical appearance alone challenges and confronts dominant gender stereotypes of sexual female imagery (Chapkis, 1986). This physical factor, which she uses as a stylistic feature of performance to underpin content features such as subject material, contributes significantly to moving her performances away from the thematic base of the mainstream type. In contrast, Laine's physical appearance exemplifies stereotypical images of female sexuality and she makes no attempt to ridicule or undermine it. Rather, she uses stereotypes to develop joking references from a position of superiority within them. In her performances, Laine utilises gender stereotypes of sexually predatory males and the guile's of women, like herself, to attract them. However, while she does ridicule stereotypical heterosexual machismo, she does so without challenging the inherent sexism of the stereotypes. For example, she tells of how many of the men she has had sexual encounters with would brag about their sexual prowess and then goes on to develop joking references based on the juxtaposition of her 'real' experience of these men as wholly sexually inadequate in terms of the size of their penis and/or their sexual competence with women. Although Laine can authenticate her joking material as a woman who could obviously attract many men, she does not produce a type of performance from which her audiences can appreciate her as an authentically politically sexually liberated woman who is challenging dominant sexist stereotypes.

The successfulness of the live performance humour of Ellie Laine is generative of a theme that is typically mainstream. Within this thematic structure the

stylistic feature of her physically authenticated sexual desirability to men provides an audience with a visual referent to her 'category-routinised' content material, which confirms the thematic emphasis of her joking material as mainstream in that it is more readily associated with a lack of sexual political credibility; and where the success of the performance depends upon a social context in which an audience will accept the established stereotypes she uses as legitimate joking material. As a consequence, the performances of Ellie Laine, unlike the performances of other physically attractive female performers such as Jenny Eclair or Donna McPhail, who also develop sexual subject material concerning men and their sexual encounters with them, is not thematically structured to be acknowledged as being of a type that has authentic sexual political credibility with an audience. Hence, the thematic base of the type categories allows performances with notably similar content and style features of performance (such as Ellie Laine and Jenny Eclair) to be differentiated as perceptibly different types of performance.

Double (1995) argues that to utilise culturally defined targets as joking butts, requires a performer to occupy a position of superiority. This is a position he identifies with mainstream comedians.[3] It is a position that Zillman (1983) argues is characterised by a 'dispositional' view of the humour that is produced, which requires those who laugh at a joke to recognise that they are of a higher social standing than the butt of the joke. This is also known as disparagement humour in that joking material is not conducted with a 'self-directed disparagement view', which dictates that a performer must justify joking references by acting as the butt of the jokes. This indicates a clear difference between the types of performance of Brand and Laine.

Brand's position as a performer is not one of superiority in terms of a self-congratulatory realisation of stereotypical sexual female imagery and this influences the use of her physical attributes of fatness and unattractiveness as a the source of self-deprecatory joking-material. This is evident in the work of Brand, who uses her physical self extensively as the butt of jokes in her

performances. For example, she refers to having carpet burns on her chin from where, 'the bloke had tried to drag me out of his flat after a night on the piss', and she tells of how she had to run from a house fire at night in a baby-doll night-dress and seven passers-by tried to push her back in. In this joking material there is the tacit acknowledgement that because of her physical appearance she is not positioned to authenticate the use of the same content material as Laine. If Brand was to use the same joking references as Laine, she would not be able to hold them in a joking frame that an audience would immediately recognise and would, therefore, need to communicate to an audience that such references were intentional joking misnomers. For example, Laine jokes about a man wanting to have sex with her in front of a mirror, but has to proceed from that scenario to a comic denouement, because, looking at Laine, there is nothing inherently funny about that image as members of an audience can see that this could be a realistic sexual fantasy for many men. However, if Brand used such a reference to a man wanting to have sex with her in front of a mirror, then the humour would be present in the image and an audience would need to understand that it must have been intended as a joke at the expense of her fat self. Because Brand is not able to visually authenticate joking references within the same joking frame as Laine, she cannot use the same sexual content material in the same way as Laine. Hence, when Laine attacks men with 'little cocks' that can't satisfy her, she does so with an unmistakable assurance predicated on her power of sexuality that men will want to try. Wolfe (1992) comments on fatness as a typical view of feminist women that deprives women of power of sexuality within the culture. Consequently, Brand, without power of sexuality, has to modify the same joking references to men's sexual prowess by including self-disparaging disclaimers, such as being happy with what she can get, beggars can't be choosers, the man was blind etc., or accept the potential of her not using a pre-emptive disclaimer for it to be used against her as a heckle by members of an audience. Therefore, while both performers have developed performances which establish men as legitimate targets for butts of jokes, they have substantial thematic differences which locate Laine's performance as a mainstream type and Brand's performance as a circuit type.

The butts of jokes that characterise mainstream type performances refer to the kind of 'category-routinised' content material that Paton (in Powell and Paton, (eds.) 1988) assigns to 'conservative' comedians, such as Les Dawson [sic] Jimmy Tarbuck and Frank Carson (pp.208-9), and Wilson (1979) refers to as conservative joking (pp.229-31). These jokes are standardised in their form, (Mulkay, 1988; Palmer, 1994) and work with traditional comic categories that utilise dominant cultural stereotypes. Typically, they are written by someone other than the performer and are ultimately consigned to a common pool of jokes and gags that predominantly mainstream performers draw from. As these jokes can operate as self-contained units with their own technical comic structure that requires formal closure in the form of a punchline (Nash, 1985; Raskin, 1985; Neale and Krutnik, 1990; Chiaro, 1992), they can be selected from the pool and immediately incorporated into a performance. Hence, the telling of an ordered routine of exchangeable standardised punchline jokes, from a non-dispositional, disparagement position of superiority, which encourages members of an audience to laugh *at* human faults and frailties, is put forward as a distinguishing characteristic of mainstream type performances, which will be shown to be a clear point of comparison with performances that characterise the 'circuit' type category.

Circuit type

If this thesis was being written in the mid 1980's the term 'alternative' would most likely have been used as the title of a type category based on a thematic structure that would include performances with an established credibility as a radical, political and essentially left-wing critical alternative to the dominant ideological structures that 'alternative' performers perceived as being perpetuated by mainstream performers.[4] Whether the 'politically correct' anti-Conservative, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-xenophobic humour accredited to commonly named 'alternative comedians', such as Ben Elton, Arthur Smith and Alexie Sayle had a substantive claim to challenge capitalist ruling class hegemony and articulate a radical new consciousness, is a subject for

a separate thesis, the point being made here is that 'alternative' is not to be used as a type title in this thesis, as it does not now (2001) indicate an identifiable thematic base to define a designated type category.

Cook (1994) points out that 'Alternative' comedy 'mirrored the rise and fall of Margaret Thatcher, who provided the political fodder for this new wave of wit - and the socio-economic conditions in which it flourished' (p.7). It also flourished in the particular social context that was provided by the corresponding development of comedy clubs as a particular venue setting for live performance humour. In the UK the first comedy club, called the Comedy Store, was opened in Central London in the summer of 1979 by Peter Rosengard. With the club itself being novel and something of an experiment in the UK, based on the success of comedy clubs in the United States, it actively encouraged comedy writers and performers to experiment by giving them a platform to be different in a different kind of venue setting. The emergent Bohemian image of this small club in Dean Street, Soho, attracted audience members who were amenable to the experimental nature of performances and to the development of an anti-mainstream 'alternative' humour that was emphatically politically anti-Conservative and anti-Establishment.

The lack of diversification of comedy clubs at this time concentrated the alternative ethos of what was accepted as successful joking content within the Comedy Store, onto a high profile political plane that caused many of the performers, who started working in the Comedy Store in the mid-1980's, to feel that the banner of alternative humour had begun to impose a series of non-joking subjects and prescriptive taboos that could blight a performance if broached. They claim it reached a point where there was open competition to be the most 'correct' performer, and good material would be wasted simply because an adjudged 'non-correct' word or reference, like 'girlfriend' was used (Iley, 1992). However, from the mid-1980's the number of comedy clubs began to expand and appear in major cities throughout the UK, culminating in the boom of the early 1990's. This boom involved the expansion of a range of commonly named

venue setting categories, such as fringe, college bars, comedy clubs/cafes and some public houses and cabaret settings, that combine to form what is referred to collectively as the comedy circuit. The collective reference is made on the grounds of the venue settings sharing a number of significant characteristics that define them as a social context which is conducive to the success of a particular type of performance that is not 'mainstream' and is not an emphatically radical/political 'alternative' performance that characterised comedy club venues in the 1980's. As a consequence of the development of the comedy circuit, the particular social context of a comedy club, as a particular venue setting category for 'alternative' performances, changed significantly to become amalgamated into a plethora of venue setting categories that were developed commercially throughout the UK as social contexts for the performances of non-mainstream content material. This enabled performers to develop performances while working continually on the circuit to new audiences in different venue settings across the country. The 'alternative comedian' correctness of the early comedy clubs was weakened, and the circuit became less prescriptive on joking content, which allowed for a range of performances to develop that are now put forward as characteristic of a type category that is to be titled 'circuit'. Cook (1994) argues that the politically radical 'Alternative' performers have been replaced by a 'fresh generation' of comic talent who use material that is 'usually non-racist and non-sexist rather than resolutely anti, and politically neutral (or, more often, apathetic)' (p.7). Hence, the term alternative is not to be used as a type title as it is deemed to be outdated, vague and misleading in that it could signify a radical political thematic basis to a type category which simply does not represent the classification of performances (including contemporary comedy club performances) to the type. The term 'circuit' has, therefore, been chosen to name a type that refers to performances that are to be classified on the basis of a particular thematic association between content and style features of performance; the social context provided by particular venue setting categories (that will be detailed in chapter four) that have developed extensively throughout the UK; and a commercial imperative upon which the (un)successfulness of circuit type performances depend.

In contrast to the characteristic content and style features of mainstream type performances of 'conservative' joking material being presented in the style of a routine of jokes being told in a third person commentary, circuit type performances are of a more characteristically 'radical' joking content presented in a first person narrative style. The use of the term 'radical' to refer to joking material, draws on Wilson's (1979) definition, in that it is more inclined to establish rich and powerful groups as targets or butts, rather than powerless groups, such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or any other form of out-grouping that characterises 'conservative' joking material (p.3). Unlike mainstream performances, circuit performers invariably write a significant amount of their own material and personally stylise it using a variety of techniques, such as biographical detail, personal history/experience, idiosyncratic observations, characterisation and monologues.

Cook (1994) argues that the authorship of content and simplistically personalised style produce particular features of performance that make it difficult for other performers to use it to develop a performance (p.15), in the way a mainstream performer can by putting together a routine of easily exchangeable jokes. There is a clear distinction to be made between the content feature of circuit and mainstream performances, with circuit performances being characterised by more conceptual joking material and mainstream performances being characterised by exchangeable jokes, gags and one-liners. This distinction is evident in the utilisation of a rhetorical technique called 'position taking' by circuit type performers, which can produce humour without the use of identifiable jokes or gags. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) explain that position taking is a technique that is recognised when a performer gives a distinctly personal account of a particular issue, and then immediately offers a candid evaluation of the issue that invites audience members to (humorously) appreciate the position taken (p.131). This is not the same type of content as telling punchline based jokes and gags on a particular subject with a particular deprecatory butt.

In addition to characteristic differences in content and style features of circuit and mainstream type performances, the commercial development of the comedy circuit and the influence this has had on performance features, contributes significantly to the thematic structure of the circuit type category. As circuit venues became an established part of the commercial night life of cities across the UK, following the rapid increase in numbers during the early 1990's, the aim to make profit from them necessitated the booking of performers who could satisfy a customer audience. The demand from the circuit audience was for a new generation of stand-up and improvisational comedy, that first began as live performance humour in comedy clubs, but which was popularised by radio and television. The commercial motivation of the different venue settings forming the comedy circuit demanded that a type of performance should be booked to attract and satisfy an audience, and this is regarded by Double (1995) as a crucial factor in the demise of authentically radical 'alternative' comedy.

In a paper to the BSA Sociology of Humour Conference in 1995, Double presented a detailed account of the thematic association between performance and commerciality that is used here to define the circuit type category. As a stand-up performer working on the comedy circuit, he was asked to manage a comedy club in Sheffield, in northern England. As the manager he was responsible for the club being successful; as defined by people attending the club as members of an audience to the performances being booked to appear and spending money as customers in the club on drinks, food, tickets etc.. As a result of his involvement in the management of the club, he become acutely aware of the 'commercial pull' of a performer as a vital factor to the survival of a comedy club. In his position, he found the one thing he had to consider above all else with regard to booking a performer, was that whatever a performance involved, it must be successful with an audience. Double referred to his experience of booking a stand-up performer called Tony Allen, whom he had the greatest artistic admiration for and who he regarded as the 'godfather' of alternative comedy. He had watched Allen work successfully in the Comedy Store in London a number of times to high critical acclaim and thought that booking

Allen's 'radical comic genius' would be a fine acquisition for the Sheffield club. His efforts to secure the booking were successful and Allen went on stage in the club to the eager anticipation of a large audience. However, as Allen's performance progressed, Double found himself in an increasingly difficult and discomforting position as he watched the performer he admired 'do some remarkable things on stage' and fail completely with the audience in the club. The performance began with what seemed to be a flat narrative denouement of the expectation of humour and laughter from the occasion in which he (Allen) and the audience were participants. Double concedes that it may have been that Allen reserved the right to artistic integrity and was experimenting with some radical new idea on comedy that required an intellectualism of the performance to be appreciated. Yet, while the audience showed an obvious uncertainty about what was happening on stage, a tentative acceptance of the comic negation was demonstrated, as if it was a part of a comic master plan for the performance that would culminate in some form of comic juxtaposition that would make it funny. Instead, Allen continued in the same vein and ventured into a diatribe of reflexive introspection about his real self as a person and not as a performer experiencing routine comic exigencies of 'a funny thing happening to him on the way to the show', which he argued vehemently that they (the audience) expected of him as their comic persona. Double observed that the effect of this was visibly disturbing to the audience and attention began to break away from Allen as members of the audience started to make remarks to each other and cast inquisitive glances around the rest of the audience to see if their personal disillusionment with the performance was shared. The observational confirmation of a plainly disconcerted audience produced a rapid deterioration in the situation. Assuming responsibility for the success of the club, Double found himself in an ambivalent position: while he could appreciate what Allen was doing as an artiste making an intellectual challenge to conventionalised stand-up live performance humour, he was forced to accept that the performance was a failure because it did not secure the vital appreciation of an audience who, as customers, are vital to the commercial viability of the comedy club.

For Double, the dilemma facing many managers of venue settings making up the comedy circuit is, therefore, one of artistic versus commercial integrity. He claims that this dilemma has found an easy resolution in that the increased commercialism of circuit venue settings has resulted in the decreased radicalism of live performance humour. With all managers of circuit venue settings under the same commercial pressure, the venue settings making up the circuit have changed so that the aesthetics of a performance as an authentic art form, with the freedom of artistic integrity to be creative and experiment with the parameters of humour, are stifled and subverted by the economic pressure to make money by requiring that a performance comply with the demands of what a ubiquitous circuit audience considers to be funny and entertaining.

Cook (1994) argues that a key factor for the expansion of the comedy circuit is the 'inexpensive simplicity' of the form of live performance humour, both as an art form in that it is perceived as something that 'anyone can do'; and in terms of staging performances in that it involves very little capital outlay as stand-up comedy requires minimal technical provision, a microphone and small public address system, or any significant alteration to be made to an existing premises to accommodate a performance space and where a 'toilet can be used as a dressing room' (pp.8-10). Consequently, landlords and publicans began to cash in on the popularity of the entertainment to be found in comedy clubs by setting up 'comedy nights' in their establishments to attract custom and entrepreneurs began to speculate on the comedy business. Mark Tugham, owner of the Glee Club, reported as being 'Birmingham's leading comedy venue', (circa 1995) tells of how he was inundated with calls from 'guys who have been made redundant', who want to know how to start a comedy club in the belief that if they 'can get hold of a space' they can capitalise on the fashionableness of comedy as 'a sunrise industry' and 'make money in a short time' (Spillius, 1995).

As a result of the (provide-a-space-and-microphone-to-make-money-from-stand-up-comedy venue) extension to the size of the circuit, there developed an extended circuit audience with a more generalised set of expectations from live

performance humour, than early comedy club audiences who were provided with the social context of a particular venue setting in which experimentation with live performance humour was the norm (Wagg, in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.), 1996). This is to say, there is a concomitant demand for the 'type' of performers who can be successful working on the circuit, which exerts further commercial pressure on performers who are booked to appear in these venues to be funny in order to secure their continued employment. If the driving concern of a performer is to persist with an exploration of the art form at the expense of meeting the humorous demands of an audience, the performer will risk developing a reputation that can prevent them from being booked to appear in some venue settings on the circuit. This is exacerbated as a result of many venue settings on the circuit imposing an ambivalent status on members of an audience as customers in the venue setting. In order for entrepreneurial objectives for a venue setting to be realised, the ambivalent position of audience as customer and customer as audience must be maintained, as performances that can not provide an audience with at least a basic level of amusement, will undermine commercial goals in their failure to attract customer spending power. As a result, the space set aside in a premises, such as a public house, to create a venue setting for live performance humour can be withdrawn as a non viable commercial proposition if performers do not perform a successful type of performance.

Unlike comedy clubs with their emphasis on live performance humour to attract an audience, a room set aside in a public house one night a week does not have such an emphatic investment in performance. Managers of these settings reserve the right to close a 'comedy night' that has been established on their premises, if they feel they could make more money from some other form of entertainment, such as music or quiz nights. This was the management's decision at the Brewer and Firkin pub in Durham city, who withdrew their Wednesday night lease of a basement room to the organisers of the 'Firkin funny club' in 1996. Despite the recognised success of the Firkin to attract good circuit performers, such as Richard Morton, Anvil Springsteen and Vladimir McTavish, who were successful with Firkin audiences, the decision to close the room to the comedy

club was made on the grounds that it was not providing the level of audience as customer to make it a strong commercial asset to the pub. The view that a different form of entertainment would be more economically viable, namely the introduction of theme music nights such as 1970's disco, with half priced drinks until 9.30, was enough incentive for the management to make their mind up that the comedy club was to be closed as a commercial failure.

As an adjuvant to the commercialism of the comedy circuit as a significant constituent factor to the thematic base of the circuit type category, is the private financial imperative on the part of the performer to be successful in order to secure bookings and, therefore, personal income, especially with the incentive of making the big time in television. This imperative is compounded by the emergence of large agencies and production companies, such as 'Avalon', 'Gilded Balloon' and 'Pacific Rim' that have grown as an integral part of the comedy circuit, and which aim to make profit from their management of performers working on the circuit (Martin, 1999; Dugdale, 1999). Agencies such as Avalon, for example, have also invested in the expansion of the circuit by developing networks of clubs across the UK, such as the 'Jongleurs' nation-wide franchise. Therefore, with vested interests in the circuit, agencies aim to promote those performers who are successful with audiences in order to reap the rewards of profit on bar sales, food, admission fees etc., from clubs they own, as well as from percentage commissions from the artistes they manage. Also, by working to develop the career interests of their clients financially, these agencies are instrumental in the artistic development of performers, as it makes commercial sense to both artiste and agency alike to develop and exploit a type of performance that is successful on the circuit. Hence there is a commercial endorsement of an artiste represented by an agency to venue setting managers, that the performance will be suitably geared to being successful with an audience. Those that have been able to establish a proven track record of being successful on the circuit, are preferred to those performers who uphold their artistic integrity to be radical, experimental and 'alternative'. As a corollary, the private imperative to be successful as a performer, has been encapsulated in a

stepping-stone view of the circuit as a means to an end, that is the big time of television fame and fortune, that has led some commentators to argue that the circuit has heralded the demise of the truly 'alternative' comedian of the early comedy clubs, and that performers on the circuit today are effectively the 'new mainstream'(Cook, 1994; Cook, in Wareham (ed.), 1994).

From the way in which the type categories have been developed in this thesis, on a thematic base, it is not accepted that circuit and mainstream types of performance can be confused with one another. Any such confusion as to whether a circuit performer has become mainstream, is the result of a conventionalised common usage of the terms circuit and mainstream; where circuit is used to refer to 'alternative' performers working to small audiences in specialised comedy clubs and mainstream is given to refer to performers who are successful with large (nation-wide) audiences, primarily from having established celebrity popularity in television. However, because a growing number of circuit performers have become more popular with a nation-wide audience as a result of successful television exposure, does not mean they have become the new mainstream performers. First, as has been pointed out earlier in the chapter, there are significant differences in content and style features of circuit and mainstream type performances. Secondly, although performing to a large audience through broadcast media, there remains significant thematic differences in the types of performance which can authenticate content as either conservative category-routinised mainstream joking material, or a credible non-dispositional circuit type use of conservative category-routinised mainstream joking material as satire or a lampooning exercise for example. Thirdly, the conventionalised assumption that mainstream refers to performances that have an immediate popular appeal with a nation-wide audience, and that circuit refers to a marginalised appeal that cannot reach beyond an attendant circuit venue setting audience is to be rejected. Many circuit type performers, such as Lee Evans, Sean Hughes, Jo Brand, Jack Dee and Frank Skinner, have achieved a high level of fame and popularity because of the success of their work on television. Yet, because of the thematic basis of the type categories of performances, circuit type

performers, who are extremely popular from their work on television, can continue to work live in relatively small circuit venue settings, such as comedy clubs and fringe venues, as well as large venue settings such as theatre that are also used by popular mainstream performers. Indeed, many mainstream performers are restricted to a marginalised appeal with particular audiences in particular venue setting categories, such as working men's clubs, for example, because they are not considered to be right for (commercial) presentation in broadcast media. However, this does not mean that the joking content of a mainstream performance is marginal in its appeal, rather, that the marginality may reflect a restricted access to a nation-wide audience.

Extreme type

This type categorises performances that are designed emphatically to utilise content and style features of performance that aim to test the boundaries of what an audience can accept as live performance humour. These are the type of performances that are prepared to tread dangerously near to an infinitely fine line that differentiates between something in a performance being accepted as funny, or being regarded as something that is not an acceptable source of funniness. The test of the level of acceptability of content and style features of live performance humour, is a test of the sensibilities of a particular audience in a particular venue setting at a particular time. Hence, some performances can be rejected by some audiences as being unacceptable failures and accepted in the social context of other venue settings (or the same venue setting at a different time) as successful live performance humour.

In relation to the extreme type, the unacceptableness of a performance is defined in terms of a skilful performer overstepping a line that renders the performance unacceptable to a particular audience, rather than a performer not being sufficiently competent to develop a successful extreme performance. This is to say that extreme performers characteristically run the risk of failure, as the line they push in order to increase their successfulness as extreme performers can be

broken to produce unacceptable 'bad taste' at the cost of successful live performance humour. 'Bad taste' is being used here specifically to represent a point of transgression from acceptable to unacceptable content and/or style features of performance; and not to refer to a type of performance that is extreme in terms of 'sick' humour. This is because there is no suggestion being made that extreme performances are 'typically' based on sick humour, or that bad taste refers to performances being too sick to be acceptable. For example, from a participant observation of an extreme type performance (a 'blue' comedian) in a working men's club, I saw a group of six women leave the audience during the performance. I caught up with them in another part of the venue setting and asked them why they had left. I presumed they had perceived the performance to have been too extreme and had withdrawn because they found the joking references to be bad taste and therefore unacceptable to them as a source of humour. They laughed at me when I told them what I had presumed, and told me that such a presumption was absolute nonsense. They had not left because they were offended or affronted by the performance being too sick or in bad taste, but because they had heard it all before from a 'good' comedian and they simply did not find this one funny.

Numerous examples of bad taste can be given from the work of an extreme performer called Roy 'Chubby' Brown. As a highly successful performer playing to sell out audiences in large theatre venue settings across the UK, and with three best selling videos of his 'live' performances, Brown is constantly working to test the sensibilities of his audiences. In building his reputation as a successful extreme performer he has overstepped the bad taste line many times and has faced the consequences of performance failure because of this. One example of his overstepping the boundary of humorous acceptability as a performer took place in a Catholic working men's club in Darlington, in the North-East of England. Prior to going on stage, Brown was told that thieves had broken into the club and had stolen a number of things including a television set. When he went on stage he immediately pointed to a large crucifix mounted on a wall and said 'I see you caught the bastard that nicked the telly.' Because of the

unfavourableness of the audience's response to his remark he was not able to continue with his performance and had to be escorted from the building for his own safety.

To be more specific about the nature of the line between acceptability as humour and unacceptability as bad taste would require detail from psychological, social psychological and social anthropological theories regarding the social construction of joking taboos within a culture, that are defined as causes to the failure of humour to bad taste. Such an analysis is deemed not to be necessary within the parameters of this thesis, given that the concern here is with the construction of a type of live performance humour and not with an analysis of the social construction of bad taste. Here, the emphasis is on the propensity of performances categorised by type (extreme) to demonstrate a commitment to test the extremity of a bad taste/humour dichotomy that is defined in terms of a thematic association between features of performance and the social context of a performance to an audience in a particular place at a particular time. Hence the thematic base of the 'extreme' type allows that a performance is perceived by an audience to challenge a line of acceptableness in successful live performance humour that is perceived to be a delimiting line of unacceptableness and failure to bad taste. This is to say that there is no single measure of bad taste that can be universally applied to different audiences in different venue settings, against which the extremity of a performance can be assessed, and to attempt to do so would shift the emphasis of the thesis away from performance, to an analysis of the social construction of bad taste rather than the thematic construction of the type.

The performances assigned to the extreme type are, therefore, thematically based upon the potential of a performance to be extreme from an authentic commitment to content material and style of presentation that is designed to realise this potential. It is a type category that classifies performers whose skill is to discern and establish with an audience the limits of a joking frame that can hold the form and content of a performance to be humorously successful and

then set about testing the joking limits at the risk of failure from breaching the frame. The extreme type is not based on the analytical detail of social and psychological theories of humour, laughter, wit, jokes or joking relationships that aim to explain the parameters of bad taste in live performance humour. Rather, it is based on the principal thematic characteristic of intention and deliberate design, attributable to those performances that openly set out to challenge the perceptible acceptable humorous parameters of an audience in the social context of a venue setting for live performance humour.

Conclusion

Particular combinations of individual physical and social factors involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour, such as the factors forming the social context of a venue setting (which will be discussed in chapter four), as well as class, educational and occupational factors involved in the composition of an audience (as will be discussed in chapter five), mean that the assessment of a performance as belonging to a type can vary from one audience to another and from one setting to another. For example, the same performance of a stand-up comedian telling standardised category-routinised jokes about 'mother-in-laws', 'Irishmen', 'Pakis' and 'puffs' to a working men's club audience, can be shifted from being perceived as a (successful) mainstream type performance, to be considered as an (unsuccessful) extreme type, if performed to a student circuit audience, a fringe theatre audience, or a comedy festival audience. Further, there is the consideration that some of the performances that have been allocated to either circuit or mainstream types, may contain performance features that can push them towards 'extreme' on occasion, such as a mainstream comedian playing to an all male audience attending a 'stag night'. However, because of the significant factors identified in this chapter, such as the artistic intention of a performer, the contextual location of performances and the particular characteristics of a performer, that work to establish the thematic base of a type category, performances are allocated to the type they revert back to as their more typical thematic gauge. For example, particular characteristics of

individual performers, such as race and gender along with comic reputation and biographical detail are considered to be significant factors that contribute to the theme of a type, as they allow for an explanation to be made of the same joking material that is successful with an audience from one performer, to fail when used by a different and equally competent performer. This is to say, that successful material with a circuit audience based on joking about an obese promiscuous woman, using words such as fat old slapper/tart/bag desperate for a shag, can become extreme; to test the sensibilities of a circuit audience from a white heterosexual male performer with a mainstream reputation. Similarly, a performance by an obese woman using words such as fat old slapper/tart/bag desperate for a shag, that is successful with a circuit audience, may be considered as extreme in terms of the content or style (or both) by an audience at a summer season variety show on a seaside pier.

The typical thematic gauge of extreme performers, which is to work normally with an uncompromising adherence to the style and content of their performances in order to test the boundaries of humorous acceptability, does not mean that extreme performers gamble more on the successfulness of their performances than circuit or mainstream type performers. The potential for such gambling with performance is neutralised by the performances allocated to the extreme type having the characteristic that they are more attuned to a particular audience to find them funny than other performers in either mainstream or circuit types. However, unlike performers from the other types who can develop and adjust their joking material (to be more extreme for example) in order to play to a particular audience, extreme performers utilise pre-production factors, such as advertising, billing and reputation (personal/professional and venue setting) to ensure that they play to an audience that is more expectantly attuned to their extreme performance work. Hence, it is common for extreme performers to warn audiences in the billing of their acts, to stay away if 'easily offended', which also serves to clearly reaffirm audience expectations of the performance. The pre-production of an extreme performer is, therefore, an important factor to the success of a performance, as it reduces the potential for failure of a

performance that is designed specifically to fulfil particular audience expectations. Consequently, successful extreme performances enhance the reputations of extreme performers, which contributes to the strength of their pre-production, which significantly affects the composition and expectations of an attendant audience to be more attuned to the humour of the performance.

While it is accepted that the three type categories can offer only a rudimentary definition of the performances located within them, the initial designation of performances to a type is considered to be worthwhile from the point of enabling a simple distinction to be made between different performances within the extremely diverse form of live performance humour. For this reason the aim of the chapter has been to establish the three type categories as far as possible with clear and explanatory titles. This is to allow for the performances allocated to a type to be sufficiently descriptively detailed from an associative point of reference, to a type, that will facilitate illustrative comparisons to be made with performances in other types. While this will further clarify and identify the essential character of the theme of each type, it will not complete the stated aim of the typology, which is to provide a comprehensive definition of the form of live performance humour that is the subject of the thesis. In order to achieve this aim each type category established in this chapter, will be used in the next chapter as a sampling frame from which a selection of performances will be detailed to represent the complete range of each type. Hence the work undertaken in chapter three is the final stage of the completion of the typology and the cumulative definition of the subject of the thesis.

Chapter Three

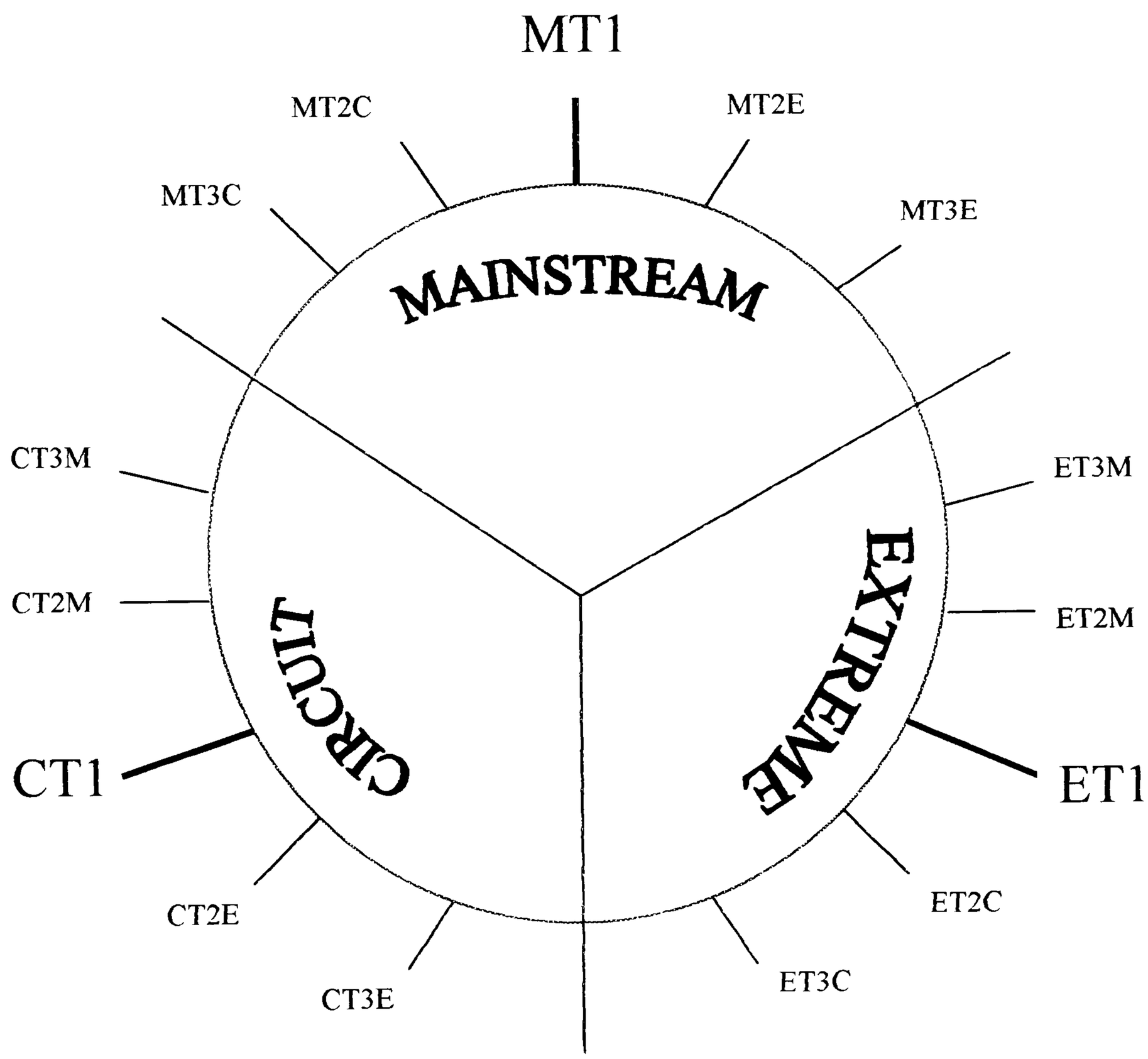
The aim of this chapter is to complete a cumulative definition of live performance humour as the form of humour that is the subject of the thesis. Chapter one set out the expansive nature of live performance humour, and put forward a circumscribed range of generic performances that constitute the form. Chapter two defined the scope and diversity of performances contained within the form, and introduced a system of classification to identify different 'types' of performances within it. To achieve the stated aim of this chapter, specific examples of performances will be used to define precisely the essential character of the form in terms of the actual performances it encompasses. The typology established in chapter two will be used to locate the examples to a type, so that each performance can be identified initially in terms of the general thematic structure of the type: namely, as: 'mainstream', 'circuit' or 'extreme'. Consequently, the three type titles will be used as sub-headings to categorise a selection of examples that aim collectively to illustrate the extent of performance variation within each type. While the names of performers who have been observed doing their work will be used initially to identify the various examples, a number and letter code will be implemented to locate each named performer precisely within a type. The most typical performances in a type will be listed as T1's, while examples of less typical performances within the type will be positioned according to their depreciating typicality as T2's or T3's as they range further outwards from T1 to both extremes of the type. From this a minimum of five examples of performances will be given for each of the three types:

O(T3) **O**(T2) **O**(T1) **O**(T2) **O**(T3)

As performances move outwards to the T2's and T3's and become progressively less typical of their type category, they are more likely to share common features of performance with T2's and especially T3's in an adjacent type. Therefore, in order to give a clear indication of the location of performances within the

complete range of the form, each of the T2's and T3's will be prefixed with the initial of the type they belong to, and suffixed with the initial of the type they move towards with increasingly finer lines of demarcation. For example, in the 'mainstream' type MT1 is the most typical performance, a MT2E performance is not as typical as it shares some similarities with some performances in the 'extreme' type, and a MT3E performance shares a lot of common characteristics with those classified as ET3M performances in the 'extreme' type. Similarly a MT3C performance in the 'mainstream' type will be close to a CT3M performance in the 'circuit' type (see fig.1).

Fig 1.



One other reason for the addition of the number and letter code is to prevent any confusion arising from using only the names of performers to provide substantive reference examples of performances. Such confusion may stem from same name or similar name performers, that the reader has no knowledge of, being used as the only source of reference to locate a performance as an example of a particular part of the range of the form. So, in order to assist the reader to clarify and confirm the designated position of each name reference example used, a diagrammatic representation of the exact location of each performance, using the proposed number and letter code, will allow name referenced examples to be checked with cross-reference to the code. For example, by consulting the chart in fig. 1, any confusion as to the type location of the name references to Steve Starr and Freddie Starr will be averted when each name is appended with a code, and one can be acknowledged as an ET2C performer and the other a MT2E (respectively). The code also provides an effective solution to a number of practical problems concerning the use of named performers that will be highlighted later in the chapter.

The form of live performance humour being studied is now characterised by a large number of professional artistes (See Jo Brand interview with McMillan, 1990; Beckett, 1999; Hutchinson (ed.), 2000). Allen (1993) claims that the 'new comedy explosion' is an unprecedented social phenomenon (p.36).

> Statistically, however, this is a more remarkable societal phenomenon than the reader might assume. Comedy has always been an extremely rare art. As of 1960 there may have been as few as three hundred professional comedians in the entire human population. Granted that creative artists are always in the minority, the fact remains that the rarest of all have been comedians. Against this background, then, the recent mushrooming of new comics is unprecedented.
>
> (Allen, 1993, p.37)

To explain why this is so is undoubtedly the subject of a separate thesis. Such a thesis would need to be concerned with a socio-theoretical examination of historical, cultural, political and economic factors that underpin the emergent popularity of the form, as well as a study of practical features of performance

that facilitate the number of exponents. Allen, for example, postulates that the dominant factor to explain 'the sudden emergence of hundreds of new comics after the long dearth' is the exposure of those twenty-five to thirty-five year olds with a 'natural tendency to be witty' to 'years of brainwashing by television comedy in one form or another.' He claims, 'the funnier of the young people, having watched this particular art form for literally all of their lives, had, largely unconsciously, absorbed the tricks of the trade' (pp.36-7). To avoid the extreme difficulties involved in assessing the relative merits of such theoretical work, this thesis is grounded upon a fundamental acceptance of the existent contemporary popularity of live performance humour. The emphasis of this research does not require an underlying explanation of that popularity, or a detailed analysis of practical elements of performance to be made in order for them to be put forward as contributory causal components to a theory of popularity. Yet, it is vitally important to the thesis that practical elements of performance are given due consideration. The reason for this, however, relates directly to the ethnographic research process and not to the production of a theory of the popularity of live performance humour. This is to say that the practical features of performance must be taken into account as observable primary source data to be detailed and described as an integral part of the practice of live performance humour. It is as a corollary to the ethnographic imperative to document significant combinations of practical features that are essential to the practice of this particular performance art form, that a more complete and insightful picture emerges that can provide detail to facilitate numerous explanations of the expanded number of artistes performing in it. For example, the relative ease with which individuals can begin as performers in the form of live performance humour compared to other forms of performance art, such as music or dance, can be substantiated by observations recording the simplicity of live performance humour in terms of the physical theatrical elements required to stage a performance.

The simplicity of setting up a venue setting for live performance humour was noted in chapter two as a significant factor contributing to the rapid development of the comedy circuit, given that a venue setting can be created with minimal

financial outlay for no more than a basic public address system, and maybe the installation of a spot-light, along with minimum effort to adapt existing premises which may, perhaps, only involve the rearrangement of tables and chairs to provide a performance space. Such simplicity enables mundane settings such as a room in a public house to be cheaply and easily developed as a performance venue with the pub toilet being used as a dressing room (Cook, 1994; Spillius, 1995). The characteristic simplicity of staging humorous performances of this kind is perfectly attuned to a number of practical elements associated with the form that relate directly to the individual as a potential performer. First, the initial decision on the part of the individual to 'have a go' at being a performer, is actively encouraged by the obvious simplicity of the form (in terms of its production) which creates the impression that 'anybody can do it' (Cook, 1994, pp.8-9). This is one of a number of significant factors that contribute directly to the number, diversity and constantly changing personnel within the form. A second factor is the immediacy of the form, which allows a person who decides they would like to attempt to succeed in live performance humour to act upon that decision as and when they want. This is because it is a performance art form that affords performers a freedom from the kind of restrictions faced by would-be performers in other forms such as music or dance. For example, a musician must spend a protracted period of time learning and practising in order to play an instrument well enough to be acceptable to an audience as a competent performer. By comparison, individuals can succeed as professional performers in the form of live performance humour without any formal training qualification (Allen, 1993). Indeed, the characteristic immediacy of live performance humour is itself commercially exploited as a particular source of humorous entertainment that can be derived from 'open mike' slots. This occurs when 'comedy venues' offer 'open spots' where members of an audience understand they are being presented with an opportunity to quite literally stand up and have a go at being a performer. The paradox that facilitates humorous entertainment being derived from such occasions, is that even those who are abysmally unfunny in their attempts at being funny performers, can be humorously appreciated by members of an audience who are positioned to expect spectacular failure from rank 'have

a go' amateurism. This is to say, that on a particular occasion in a particular social context, the immediacy of the form is able to humorously exploit performance failure.

One other factor contributing to the number and diversity of performers in the form is that it requires minimal financial outlay on the part of new performers, who are only likely to incur costs for travelling to venues, and paying the price of admission if they are using an 'open mike' platform. Unlike a musician, for example, who must pay for articles of performance such as instruments, technical equipment, insurance, transportation, and then may have to split money earned for a performance with a number of others playing as part of a band, the fledgling humorous performer, from the very beginning of their career on stage, is more likely to make a modest profit from small payments received, such as percentages of door receipts, or cash prizes won in 'open mike' competitions. Even if these payments are not forthcoming for whatever reason, the financial cost of failure is not a serious consideration for aspirant humorous performers.

> Blag an open spot at a comedy club and you won't get paid, but then again, you won't have to fork out for the privilege of being booed off either .... And if your open spot wins you a paid booking, then you're already making a profit.
>
> (Cook, 1994, p.10)

As a consequence of the ease of access to the form being effectively maintained by the absence of restrictions such as time, training and money, the proliferation in the number of performers, along with a constantly changing performance personnel, and a corresponding expansion in the range and diversity of performances in the form, are practical features of live performance humour that must be considered when attempting to use examples of performances to represent the form. The problem of how to represent the form using a sample of performances is exacerbated by the perpetual fluidity of the population of the sampling frame, as 'new' performers continually enter the form, some performers retire from it, either permanently or temporarily, and some change the nature of their performances over time. It is impossible to generalise on

reasons why performers change their acts or cease to perform, and as it is not a concern here why performers change their performances or stop performing, it is not necessary to provide postulates such as, failure to be funny on stage, or introspective dissatisfaction on the part of an individual performer. What is of concern here is the fact that they do change or stop performing, as this means it is extremely difficult (if indeed possible) to know the exact performance composition of the form at a particular time. This is because of the practicalities involved in recording the precise number of acts at any one time, observing them all initially, and then continuing to observe them systematically over a critical period of time in order to establish whether individual performers continue to perform the same type of act, or whether they shift from one type to another, or stop performing altogether. The characteristic fluidity of the form in terms of the changeableness of performers and performances, adds to the difficulty of using only the names of performers to provide the required references to performances that are to be used as examples of the different types of performances in the form. Hence, the use of the proposed number and letter code will be shown to offer a solution to the problem of identifying specific performances that are to be used as examples of particular parts of the range of the form of live performance humour, by providing definite reference detail to the precise location of different performances within each type category.

Because of the constant factor of change in terms of performers and performances that characterises live performance humour, it is not practicable to use only the name of a performer as a reference to a particular type of performance. A substantive reliability cannot be achieved when the name of a performer, that is used as an example of a particular type of performance, may actually refer to a different type of performance owing to the passage of time. Some of the performers that were watched and documented at the start of this research, had, over a three or four or five year period, changed their acts significantly and were no longer performing the same type of act. For example, some performers with established reputations based on the success they had achieved as 'extreme' type performers, have changed the thematic structure of

their performances to either 'mainstream' or 'circuit' type. It is notable that there is a general tendency for 'extreme' type performers or CT3E performers to change their performances because of their entry into television, or in order to attempt to gain entry to the medium.[1] Conversely, some 'mainstream' type performers, who have established themselves in television comedy, have shifted towards the 'extreme' type in their 'live' (untelevised) performances.[2] It can, therefore, reasonably be assumed that significant alterations can be made to a performance in order to enhance the financial/career aspirations of the performer. Whether or not the assumption is supportable - that performers will change their performances in order to realise specific goals - is not a real concern here, however, the potential for an example of performances in a particular section of the form to be discredited as insubstantial, because a name only referenced performer given as the example may be critically reviewed as not being representative of the performances described, is a real concern which could arise as a result of the passage of time, or particular financial, artistic or career circumstances shaping the work of the named example performer into a different type of performance. This is to say that there is an inherent fallibility to using only the names of performers to identify them as the examples of performances that are to be used to represent specific parts of the range of each type category. Consequently, the name of a performer will only be used as a label to indicate an actual exponent of a performance that is deemed to be particularly illustrative of a sectional variation of performances in a type. The number and letter code will be used to clarify the exact location of each performance that is used as an example within a type category, and, therefore, ultimately within the range of the form. Hence a named performer that may have changed to perform a significantly different performance from the one originally acknowledged as being a good example of a variation of performances within a type, can remain as a good example from the use of the number and letter code to identify the original location that the name of the performer is being used to refer to. This allows the examples to be used, that have been chosen from the time period covering the full duration of the study, to stand as viable and admissible because they demonstrate essential characteristics that typify a variant

section of the range of a type. The number and letter code is therefore designed to ensure that an example performance is not criticised and rejected because (for whatever reason) the performance is no longer given by the name referenced performer.

A second major practical consideration to be made regarding the use of examples of performances, is to decide upon how many examples to use to clearly represent both the number and the variation of performances within the form. From the work put forward in chapters one and two, live performance humour is recognised as a form of humour that has different types of performance which actively encourage performers to develop performances that can be identified as being different from others in a type that are essentially the same. For example, Tom O'Connor, Jimmy Tarbuck, Bob Monkhouse, Ronnie Corbett, Bruce Forsyth and Roy Walker, are the names of some 'mainstream' type performers who are identified as being MT1 performers, because they belong to the same variant grouping within the type for the following reasons: They look the same in the way they dress conservatively in suits and ties, and effectively they tell the same kind of jokes with the same 'conservative' joking content in the same stand up joke-telling style in the same venue setting categories. Yet they are each able to perceptibly differentiate their performances from all of the others. Cook (1994) argues that in effect, no two acts are the same. Even when they tell exactly the same jokes - which performers of this type frequently do - they will be told differently, as each individual performer brings a unique mixture of professionally refined technical components such as intonation, inflection, facial expression, gesture and comic timing to deliver the joke in their own peculiar and characteristically consistent style (p.6). However, despite 'individualisation' techniques, these performers do share performance components that are sufficiently identifiable for them to be recognised by audiences, managers, booking agents and pre-production advertising as having essential similarities, and are, therefore, able to be classed as a particular grouping within the 'mainstream' type which can be represented with example.

The number of examples of performances to be used is determined by the number of identifiable groupings within each type category. While five core groupings have initially been identified to cover the range of a type from T1 outwards to both T3's, some of the groupings in some types will be split in order to show significant differences in the way performers have developed perceptibly different performances of essentially the same joking material. For example, in the MT1 section of the 'mainstream' type, performances will be split into three distinct groups: 'gag men', 'character acts' and 'entertainers', and an example will be given of each group. Not all five core groups within each of the three types need to be split in this manner; consequently 19 examples will be used in the chapter to demonstrate the range of performances in the form of live performance humour. Additional performances will be detailed throughout the course of the thesis for various illustrative purposes, and as they will be identified to a type and located within it using the number and letter code, they will effectively contribute to a definitive clarification of the form.

Mainstream type performances

The 'mainstream' type is characterised by performers who are commonly identified as comedians, primarily because they rely upon what Paton (in Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988), refers to as verbal performances that use established 'category-routinised' content material in a joke-telling style. This means that the content references used as the basis for joking material are well established as familiar themes to members of a 'mainstream' performers audience. Paton uses the example of 'mother-in-law' and ethnic stereotype jokes to illustrate the 'conservative' nature of 'category-routinised' joking material. The familiarity of an audience with the joking content of 'mainstream' performers seals a determinate level of expectancy from a performance which an artiste must fulfil if they are to be successful. This determinacy is heightened when an artiste performs in highly institutionalised venue settings, like working men's clubs, where, as will be explained in chapter six, the expectations of (concert room) audiences are themselves routinised. This is to say that what a working men's

club audience will expect, is a particularly stylised presentation of category-routinised joking material from the performance of a comedian, namely the specific use of disconnected standardised, jokes, gags and one-liners, in a slick, well rehearsed and pacey format (Gray, 1994). A performance in which jokes are recognised by audience members as distinctive and self-contained units of humour that are funny independently of other jokes used in the performance (Polio and Edgerly, in Chapman and Foot (eds.), 1976; Palmer, 1994). This is permissible because each joke has its own internal structure which organises what Koestler (1964) refers to as 'frames of reference' (p.38), in which 'associative contexts' can be 'bisociated' to produce a humorous effect (p.35). He uses a statement which appeared in a fashion article in *Vogue* magazine just after the second World War as an example,

> Belsen and Buchenwald have put a stop to the too-thin woman age, to the cult of undernourishment.[4]
>
> It makes one shudder, yet it is funny in a ghastly way, foreshadowing the 'sick-jokes' of a later decade. The idea of starvation is bisociated with one tragic, and another, utterly trivial context.
>
> (Koestler, 1964, pp.36-37)

A more recent example of a 'sick-joke' used by an ET3M performer ('extreme' performers who are close to the 'mainstream' type) called Bernard Manning, further demonstrates the principle of bisociation and the single point of humorous climax it produces within the independent structure of the joke. The performance of the joke starts with Manning referring to video evidence of the savage beating of Rodney King, a Black man, by four white Los Angeles police officers in March 1991.

> 'Did you see on the telly them four white coppers hammering the shit out of that Black bloke?'

Using visually stylistic non-verbal performance techniques, such as a saddened facial expression and a slow remorseful shaking of the head, he then goes on to say in a resolutely aggrieved tone of voice that he thought what had happened to Rodney King was totally wrong,

'Its just not right you know ... [shakes head disapprovingly, speaking mournfully] ... just not right at all.'

Then, suddenly, with a radically altered demeanour of uplifted head and confidently assured expression corroborating an assertive and aggressive tone of voice, Manning intersects the projected plane of moral indignation at racial injustice with an immoral plane of racism,

'There was never enough coppers there to do a proper fucking job.'

The effect of humour (on this comedian's audience) is produced at the point of bisociation between the two planes. This is what Koestler refers to as 'the point of culmination' (p.37), and typically, 'mainstream' comedians use the kind of jokes that Koestler maintains,

> belong to a class of jokes and anecdotes with a single point of culmination

as different from,

> The higher forms of sustained humour, such as satire or the comic poem, [that] do not rely on a single effect but on a series of minor explosions or a continuous state of mild amusement.
>
> (Koestler, 1964, p.37)

The single point of culmination in the jokes used typically by 'mainstream' comedians is more commonly referred to as the punchline. Both terms effectively indicate the humorous climax of a particular joke, and both terms signal the precise parameters of a joke by delimiting the specific context in which a punchline works. The punchline of a joke is, therefore, a defining characteristic of a joke. This means jokes are recognised as jokes and qualify as jokes because they always have a punchline present (Chiaro, 1992, p.48). There is, however, some variation in the intensity of the punchline emphasis in different 'mainstream' type performances. For example, MT3C performers (at the extreme of the type bordering with the 'circuit' type) have a weaker joke/punchline performance and a stronger 'series of minor explosions' format. MT3E performers (at the extreme of the 'mainstream' type bordering with the 'extreme' type) maintain a strong commitment to a joke/punchline format, but

shift the emphasis of the joking content to a point where routinised mainstream themes are developed to levels that are considered to be unsuitable for television output, even after a late hour broadcast watershed.

Quintessential 'mainstream' type performers tell jokes that are heavily dependent on the impact of a punchline for their humorous effect, and their performances are, therefore, geared to provide strong, obvious and frequent punchlines that members of an audience can easily 'get'. Hence, a typical feature of 'mainstream' performers is to strive to make jokes and gags obvious rather than wistfully subtle or in any way obtuse, by involving factors such as an intellectual challenge that may prevent members of an audience from getting the joke. In order to maximise the comic potential of punchline dependent joking material, 'mainstream' performers must ensure that for most, if not all of the time of a performance, everyone in an audience is given every opportunity to 'get' the joke. For example, non-performance factors such as pre-production, that will be detailed in chapter five, are used to give audience members some assurance that they will be able to get the jokes. This includes the identification of a particular venue setting with a particular type of performance, and the reputation or billing of a (MT1) performer, being used to contribute to a performance being identified as being characterised by easily identifiable jokes. A MT1 performer, like any other live humorous performer, must play to an audience and work to meet audience expectations, hence an adherence to a category-routinised joking content presented in a joke-telling punchline format, is maintained in order to increase the probability of being successful.

To further increase the probability of success, 'mainstream' performers become expert at signalling to an audience the exact point of impact of a punchline as the point when laughter should occur. They do this by developing stylised forms of behaviour that are used as cues to emphatically precipitate a pause immediately after the delivery of a punchline to allow an audience a period of time to laugh. For example, the fidgeting adjustment of items of clothing, jewellery, hair, props etc., or for a performer to simply stop talking in order to engage in the reception

of a punchline themselves with a laugh or a smile or a particular facial expression. A timely puff on a cigar or cigarette is a common technique that has been mastered by many comedians over many years, to judiciously measure the optimum duration of a pause for laughter to maximise the extraction of humour from a punchline. A famous exponent was George Burns, a veteran American (MT1) performer who always appeared on stage smoking a cigar. He exemplified a competent professional performer's expertise to judge the humorous impact of a punchline on an audience, by nonchalantly puffing on his cigar for as long as he deemed a laughing response from an audience warranted.

The way in which performers communicate the punchline climax of a joke through the use of visual and/or verbal cues is called 'metacommunication', and all performers in the form of live performance humour become, 'adept at using metacommunication with the audience to tell them when to laugh' (Fine, in McGhee and Goldstein, 1983, p.164). However, with 'mainstream' type performers there is a tendency for this type of communication to depreciate in subtlety. For example, some have developed personally stylised gimmicks like a 'catch-phrase' that functions to emphasise both the punchline of a joke, and at the same time capitalise on the extraction of laughter from the joke. This is because a catch-phrase is developed as a deliberate humorous quirk that is intended to become uniquely associated as a trademark of a particular humorous performer, and therefore connotative of humorous performance. Ken Dodd, for example, an established MT1 performer, has only to walk on stage and use his catch-phrase: 'Oo misus, how tickled I am', in order to get a laugh from an audience. Duncan Norville, a MT1 performer who has developed a 'camp' performance, will affect a coquettish glance at a male member of the audience and then tease them with his catch-phrase 'chase me', which successfully produces laughter. Notably, while the vast majority of jokes used by 'mainstream' performers will be shown to be general and interchangeable between performers, the catch-phrases they use are absolutely performer specific as a source of humour. Indeed, the only way they can be used to humorous effect

by other performers, is as a signifying cue of an intentionally comic impersonation of the performer the catch-phrase is associated with.

It has already been mentioned that MT1 performances, which form the most typical section of performances in the 'mainstream' type, are to be split into three variant groupings; 'gag-men', 'character acts' and 'entertainers'. The performers referred to as 'gag-men' are given the title because they stand up on stage and tell one short joke (a gag) after another in quick succession. Gags are succinct and can carry the potential to be adapted to be used as 'one-liners'. They are characteristically independent of each other and contain their own specific and isolatable punchline. As a result, the organisation of gags within the structure of a performance do not correspond to a significantly discernible level of consequential continuity from one gag to another. The gags used in a MT1 'gag-man's' performance are not predicated upon a single joking theme which acts as a narrative structure to underpin the humorous references contained within them, although some performers do make use of 'running jokes' whereby several gags are made on a particular theme: for example, 'my wife is so fat ....', 'my bloke is so lazy ....', 'we were so poor ....'. While the theme serves as a frame of reference so that a number of different gags can be strung together to maintain a momentum of laughter that an initial joking reference started, each gag could be told independently of the others, as indeed they are, as it is common for members of an audience to remember one of the many gags used in such a string and tell it to their friends as an indication of the funniness of the performance. Stringing gags together in a 'running joke' is not the same as a performance having a narrative structure that is more comparable to a monologue. In accepting that MT3C performers in the 'mainstream' type category will be more amenable to having a more developed narrative structure underpinning the joking material they use, MT1 performers are known to their audiences as having the characteristic of being able to keep a joke running on the impetus of a readily available stock of gags they can call upon to maintain it.

The particular form and content of MT1 'gag-man' performances distinguishes a 'running-joke' from a monologue or other narrative strategies that are used more characteristically in other types - especially the 'circuit' type. This is because numerous MT1 'gag-men' have established solid reputations as successful performers on their well honed abilities to gather an extensive stock of gags, and then demonstrate their 'verbal artistry' and precision at being able to select the most effective ones to use at a given moment in a performance. By making an apparently impromptu gag-cracking response to a particular feature of an audience, such as an individual's appearance, or an obvious movement such as someone leaving the auditorium or coming in late, for example, performers are able to localise a ubiquitous gag to coincide with the ideography of a particular person or event, and this can effectively enhance the impact of a gag by making the performer appear 'quick' or 'sharp', which are terms of commendation reserved for performers who are acknowledged as competent by an audience. A MT1 'gag-man's' commitment to gags as a means of producing laughter is therefore, strengthened by the positive regard of an audience, in that an established quick gag-cracking basis of a reputation be maintained from the presentation of a type of performance that will fulfil the expectations of an audience. Hence, an audience is able to recognise a running joke in a MT1 performance as a string of gags, and not as a monologue or a definite narrative strategy.

The potential for any confusion to be made regarding the different kinds of performances within the most typical (MT1) section of the 'mainstream' type, is further removed by the characteristic of discontinuity between gags used in performances. Indeed, some 'gag-men' have developed performances to maximise the comic potential of discontinuity, by locating gags within a contrived erratic style of presentation that comically pronounces the gags as gags. This is to say that each gag is stylistically signalled to an audience as an individual package to be accepted wholly and unmistakably as a composite and independent source of humour. The performer chosen as the example of the MT1 'gag-man' grouping demonstrates this. His name is Frank Carson, and the

style of his performance is developed around an ebullient rumbustious stage persona who delivers a constant stream of gags in quick succession, in the manner of a gag-cracking compulsive who never stops cracking gags, and who appears to be unable to stop himself from cracking gags irrespective of the quality of their content. Carson is the example of MT1 'gag-men', even though the content and style of his performances allow his work to be viewed as almost a parody of a MT1 performer. He stands still on stage in a smart suit and tie, holding a microphone in one hand and continually fidgeting with his heavy framed spectacles with the other. He laughs uproariously at his own gags in order to reinforce the punchlines and to communicate to an audience that he is a comedian doing the job they expect of him: cracking gags to make them laugh. Indeed, his loud and raucous laughter at his own gags, which is supplemented by his catch-phrase: 'its the way I tell 'em', gives a clear indication that it is his zest for joking that is the stylistic foundation of the humour of his act, rather than the content of his gags. This observation is supported by the gags being typically simplistic in their construction, and being derived entirely from either nonsensical, silly or very unsophisticated conservative category-routinised joking references. For example,

> Paddy loses his ear in an accident on a building site. One of the lads finds it and shouts to Paddy that he has it. Paddy looks at the severed ear and says its not his because his had a cigarette behind it.

Jimmy Cricket is the name of the performer to be used as the example of MT1 'character acts'. While the content of Cricket's performances is essentially the same as Carson's, in that the same conservative category-routinised frames of reference are used as the basis for gag cracking joking material, the main point of difference between the two performers (and the groupings they represent within the MT1 section of the 'mainstream' type), is the way in which they stylistically develop their stage persona as a gag-teller. Carson has developed his performance persona ostensibly around himself as a real person with a real name and a real personality that is accepted by audiences as being fundamentally the same as that projected on stage. He is perceptibly an individual who became a

comedian because he has the personality and the tendency to be funny. Although he may be acknowledged by members of his audiences as having worked hard as a professional performer to learn and rehearse the gags he uses, Carson's performances emphasise that it is *his* personality that underpins his live performance humour. This is highlighted by him continually reminding audiences with his catch-phrase, that it is not just the cracking of gags that is funny - it is the way he tells them.

In comparison, Cricket has stylistically developed a performance based on a 'character' he has constructed called Jimmy Cricket. Audiences know that this is not a real person and that he only exists on stage for the purpose of performance. In order to present and maintain the persona of the character consistently, Jimmy Cricket always performs wearing the same costume. He wears very short black trousers that reach just below the knee and show a band of bare skin between the bottom of the trousers and the top of his old black wellington boots. His black 'claw-hammer' dinner jacket is too small and ridiculously juxtaposed with a battered old felt hat that looks like a fisherman's souester. The costume is designed for comical effect in itself, and also to provide an audience with a visual reinforcement of the character of Jimmy Cricket as an adult simpleton. With a constant demeanour of bewilderment and extreme simple-minded naiveté, presented through an extensive range of vacant facial expressions, Cricket is able to enact a stereotype of a village idiot as a 'character' frame of reference to support the joking material he uses. Further, he is Irish and speaks with a pronounced Irish accent when in character in performance. The Jimmy Cricket character is, therefore, one of an Irish simpleton telling culturally stereotyped 'Irish' jokes (Davis, in Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988). A performance technique of Cricket's act, unlike Carson's, is for him to crack gags (often the same gags as Carson), but in a style of him (the character) making sincere comment and conversation, and who then looks innocently at the audience with puzzlement to show that he simply does not understand what they are laughing at. This allows the character of Cricket's performance to be used to authenticate the inverted logic of his 'Irish' gags, from

the teller not being able to comprehend what is wrong with what he has said. Jimmy Cricket's MT1 performance is not like that of the assured and confidently boisterous gag-cracking comedian, Frank Carson, and a clear indication of this is given in Cricket's catch-phrase, which is to beckon to an audience urgently to, 'come here, there's more', as though they were being called to an intimate huddle with him so that he can tell them a big secret. For example, after his catch-phrase call to an audience to come and participate in a strict confidence with him, he lowers his voice to tell the audience of his top secret discovery; that if you pull all the legs off a spider it goes deaf! He confides that he knows this because he had trained a spider to walk on command, and when he pulled all its legs off it wouldn't walk any more - obviously it could no longer hear the command.

The third grouping within the MT1 section of the 'mainstream' type is 'entertainers', and the example to represent this group is Brian Conley. As with all MT1 performers, gags form an integral part of Conley's act, but they are not the only source of his joking material. As a MT1 'entertainer', Conley does other things in his performances to make people laugh, rather than exclusively stand up and crack gags. In addition to telling gags and jokes he does impersonations and performs as characters he has invented *a la* Dick Emery and Harry Enfield. He does short sketches that feature him playing one of his characters in scripted scenarios, and he also sings and does dance routines. Unlike MT1 'gag-men' and 'character acts', Conley changes his stage persona throughout the course of a performance; sometimes playing a stand-up comedian complete with suit, tie and microphone, sometimes a buffoon fooling around in costume, sometimes a serious singer and dancer, and sometimes a comic singer and dancer. Conley has a versatility as a humorous performer that is keenly demonstrated on stage in the composition of his performances. Unlike a 'character act', Conley always reverts back from the characterisations he undertakes in a performance to perform as 'himself'. However, despite differences in the range of stylistic and technical competencies employed by Conley, Carson and Cricket in their performances, they, like all of the performers

in the MT1 section of the type, share the same ubiquitous 'mainstream' conservative category-routinised joking material as the content base of their live performance humour. The three MT1 groupings are, therefore, separated essentially on the basis of their obvious stylistic variations on established content themes.

Moving towards the circuit type with MT2C and MT3C performances, there is a progressive reduction in the emphasis placed on anonymously written gags as the mainstay of the humour produced in a performance. MT2C performers do use gags, but they incorporate a number of other significant features that distinguish their performances from MT1 performers. For example, the tendency to use extended gags with a more elaborate structure that involve greater detail in the construction of a joking frame on which punchlines are predicated. This is to say that MT2C performers characteristically use jokes as well as gags, and are prepared to allow for the additional detail involved in the development of characters and plot in a joke to be accommodated in performance. Although a joke is discernibly different from the sparseness and succinctness of a gag, it is still a self contained unit of humour, and as such it is completely interchangeable, which means it is easy for performers to hear a joke and simply incorporate it into their own performances (Raskin, 1985). However, performances extending out to the limit of the range of the 'mainstream' type approaching the 'circuit' type, are progressively less disposed to use stock exchangeable jokes. By various means and to different degrees, performers in the MT3C section of the 'mainstream' type work to personalise the joking material they use. Also, there is an incremental shift in the central content themes that are used to form the joking material for performances as they move nearer to the 'circuit' type. To see how these features translate into practice, examples of MT2C and MT3C performance will be given.

Mike Elliott is the example of MT2C performances. Elliott does not regard himself as a 'gag/punchline comedian', which he strongly dislikes as being what he describes as the 'boom boom boom' approach to performance, and he refuses

to work in venues like working men's clubs which he believes determine such an approach as being the only way to succeed with audiences in them. His performances are built around protracted stories and jokes that require an audience to listen, 'without the hook of a punchline every 20 seconds'. Some of the stories are recounted as true personal experiences, and some are written by him as purely fictional comic material that may include performance techniques being utilised to stylistically support narrative strategies, such as him reading out letters he has supposedly received from political leaders for example. He tells stock exchangeable jokes that can be told again by anyone who would wish to tell them, and are dispersed throughout his performances in such a way that they appear to be used because they are his personal favourites. As an example of MT2C performances Elliott's joking material is representative of a group of performances within the 'mainstream' type that form a distinct grouping in two important respects. First, while his material is not of the order of political correctness established by 'alternative comedians' in the early 1980's, (Iley, 1992; Gritten, 1997; Spencer, 1999; Martin, 1999), his essential joking material is not based on conservative category-routinised cultural stereotypes that performers covering the range of the form from MT1 through MT3E to ET1 exploit. Secondly, although his joking material is not dependent upon topicality, he does use topical and contemporaneous references more frequently than most performers in other range groups in the 'mainstream' type, with the exception of performances in the MT3C grouping.

Billy Connolly is the example of a MT3C performer. Connolly's performances are based almost entirely on joking material derived from his own life experience and everyday observations. He tells very few stock jokes, but does use them occasionally. He has an active demonstrative style which he uses to provide visual humour by acting out scenes from the stories he tells, such as a drunk looking for a New Year's Eve party in Glasgow, or mimicking a person referred to in a story, such as an officious car park attendant with a short leg and a large orthotic boot with a six inch sole. Connolly is typical of the MT3C grouping in the 'mainstream' type, in that the joking material used in performance is not

concerned primarily with references that are conspicuously politically correct, or vouchsafed as such by a particular audience, and he uses a dedicated first person narrative style, rather than a joke-telling style, to locate the joking material, which he is largely the author of, directly to him as a performer. These are characteristic features of MT3C performances, and along with the apolitical personalised biographical joking content of his work, have established a neutrality that extends the popularity of his live performance humour across the parameters that (will be shown in chapters four and five) locate some performances to particular audiences.

Circuit type performances

Starting with CT3M performances as the grouping in the 'circuit' type that is closest to the 'mainstream' type, the performer used to example the section is Jack Dee. Dee started on the London alternative comedy circuit in the early 1980's and steadily developed performances that were successful with comedy club audiences, and which were also able to make the transition to television. Dee appears on stage sharply dressed in a suit and tie and recounts the vagaries of life as they apply to him. His style of delivery is relentlessly deadpan and laconic, which offers audiences an unmistakable demeanour of general dissatisfaction with the shape of things that come his way. He makes very little movement on stage and relies heavily on facial expressions to reiterate the humorous import of his joking content. His material is not based on exchangeable stock reference jokes; it is personalised in a way that is similar to MT3C performers in that it is written by the performer and is generated from personal experience and observation. While he does use recounted stories from his life history, the emphasis of his joking material is, however, different from MT3C performances in that it is more attuned to the exigencies of everyday life that are happening at the present time and, which he pre-supposes, have an equivalent experiential bearing on members of his audiences as they do on him. Hence his joking material can take the form of topical references to scurrilous tabloid articles, news events, music or fashion fads, celebrity gossip and other

such facets of contemporary social life. The content material of Dee's CT3M performance is not emphatically politically correct, although it is equally emphatically not conservative category-routinised.

CT2M performers, moving towards the CT1 centre of the 'circuit' type, become more noticeably aware of what they consider their audiences regard as politically correct acceptable joking material upon which to base their performances. They are careful to use references in such a way that they can at least be recognised, if not appreciated, as non-oppressive by an audience. Anvil Springsteen is the performer that is the example of CT2M performances. In performance he dresses in a crumpled casual fashion with an open-collar shirt, worn denim jeans and scuffed Doctor Marten type shoes. He looks like a stereotype of a university Arts student, which is a significant stylistic feature of his performances that works to signify a level of intellectualism underpinning the joking content. This is supported by the principal location of performances within the social context of venue settings within the comedy club category, which will be shown in chapters four and five to be a significant factor regarding the formation of an audience as a significant factor to the production of (un)successful live performance humour.[3] Springsteen builds on a stylistic signification of a non-mainstream type position as a performer, by developing joking references that aim to give testimony to his credibility as a non-racist, non-sexist, non-out grouping politically correct performer. His joking material is more topical, reflective and anecdotal than that of MT3C and CT3M performances, which are more individualistically biographical and experiential. He does tell gags and does employ performance techniques to create an impression that some of his gags are spontaneous responses to current issues. For example, he will state his synopsis of an issue and then turn his face away from the audience for a moment, as if he was thinking about it, then return with an incisively smart joking appraisal of the issue. He also conveys the impression that his replies to comments and heckles made by members of an audience, are quick-witted ad-libs that are (apparently) improvised rather than practised. Springsteen's CT2M performance shares characteristic features with CT1 performances in both style

and content, but there is a sufficiently discernible difference in the level of introspection between the two groupings within the type.

The performer example of CT1 performances is Eddie Izzard. Izzard uses himself as the basis of a substantial amount of the joking material of his performances, which is written entirely by himself. The joking material of CT1 performers is situated predominantly in observations of everyday life that succumb to humorous revision. Izzard uses such observations as grounds for building fantastic stories that enter into a surreal world; where oranges in a supermarket talk about their dedication to resist being peeled, and the thoughts of cats, who are really only pretending to purr to disguise the sound of the small pneumatic drills they are operating, are revealed to an audience. Within this sublime extension of the normal and everyday, there is interposed a subtext of Izzard as a real person who offers an exploration of himself as a reflexive person who is prepared to expose his innermost thoughts and fears and phobias. For example, in performance he will tell audiences about his love of wearing women's clothes and why he feels he wants to. As a CT1 performer he does not rely on recounted stories from his past or everyday observations or topical anecdotes; he offers audiences greater insight into his self in the content of his performances. It is the level of introspection that separates the CT1 group, that Izzard is an example of and which includes poets such as Henry Normal, from the other sectional groupings in the 'circuit' type.

CT2E performers use joking material that is based more directly on themselves as the subject of joking references, who admit to their human frailties, but do so more in terms of situational encounters and personal experiences rather than an exploration of 'self'. The joking content of CT2E performances moves them towards the 'extreme' type as it becomes more challenging to the sensibilities of audiences. While performers in this group do not use words and phrases that are acknowledged by their audiences as racist, sexist, or disquietingly politically incorrect, some words and phrases used would be regarded as being obviously politically incorrect if they were used by performers in the range of the form

from MT1 through MT3E to ET1. This is because CT2E performances are still within the 'circuit' type and as such are imbued with the thematic structure of the type as detailed in chapter two. Frank Skinner is the example of CT2E performances. In performance he dresses in smart rather than scruffy casual clothes, he tells gags, develops his own jokes and tells stories, some of which are factually based on his experiences and some of which are fictitious. He is the author of the joking material, which is primarily sexual, with a constant supply of guttural innuendo and graphic references to various sexual acts and generally depraved activities. He interacts with audiences very effectively using individual members as joking butts, and the utilisation of third party punchline material is representative of a significantly lower level of self examination and introspection that distinguishes CT2E from CT1 performances.

Jenny Eclair is the performer to example the CT3E grouping in the 'circuit' type, which is adjacent to the 'extreme' type. She has been described as the 'self-styled Queen of filth' (Comedy Review, No. 1, 1996, p.7), and blatantly and unremittingly tests the barriers of bad taste humour with her content material. She refers continually to bodily functions and sexual practices - especially as they relate particularly to women. She vividly depicts female genital peculiarities and gives completely uninhibited accounts of the detail of sexual behaviours as they apply to her. For example, at one point in her performance at the Pleasance, an Edinburgh festival venue setting, in 1993, she pretends to peel something off her throat, like a hair, and tells the curious audience matter of factly, 'its spunk!' She then put it in her mouth and after making it obvious she was tasting it, states authoritatively, 'at least three days old!' The style of her performances is that of a manic 'Prozac and Tantrums', 'peroxide bitch from hell' (Edinburgh Fringe Programme, 1995, p.79; Newcastle Comedy Festival brochure, 1996, p.8), who forcefully hammers home shamelessly blunt content references as if they are normal patterns of speech to her as a hardened streetwise woman. Representing the CT3E grouping of performances in the 'circuit' type, the content of Eclair's work is not regarded as being damaging to women in the way it would be castigated as being so if it was used in performances from the

MT1 through MT3E to ET1 range of the form (Gray, 1994). However, the joking material does have the potential to offend and is only held in the 'circuit' type by the thematic commitment of the performer,

> Until women behave as badly as men, we cannot have true equality and if that means more women pissing on the street, then so be it.
>
> (Eclair, cited in Cook, 1994, p.67)

Extreme type performances

Starting with ET3C performances, that are close to the 'circuit' type, the main point of difference with CT3E performances is the level to which performers intentionally design the content of their acts to disconcert audiences. ET3C performances aim to test the humorous resolve of members of an audience and are to be divided into two separate groupings within the section of the type - 'visual' and 'verbal'. The Jim Rose Circus is the example of ET3C 'visual' performances. The example involves members of the Circus troupe individually performing their own aesthetically challenging specialisms. (The performances of a single performer that could have been used to example the ET3C 'visual' grouping is The Bastard Son of Tommy Cooper). Jim Rose Circus performers include a man mixing a sickening cocktail of beer, tea, blancmange, cola, etc., in a transparent container and then drinking the disgusting mess, only to regurgitate it back into the container and drink it down again. Another male member of the Circus stands with breeze blocks hanging from his nipples, and then strips naked in order to swing two steam irons tied on a chain attached to his foreskin. There is a human dart board, a woman who eats glass, a man who juggles with chain saws that are in operation, a man who contorts his whole body through the unstrung head of a tennis racket and a man who has his face pushed into a tray of newly broken bottles and then has other members of the troupe stand on his head. The individual Circus acts culminate in members of the troupe running into the audience (who are now sitting in the dark because all the lights in the venue setting have been turned off) and spraying everyone with 'petrol' (water), while other members of the troupe, wearing coal-miner type torches on their

heads, wield loud revving chain saws seemingly only inches above the heads of screaming audience members. The common responses from people in an audience to the Jim Rose Circus acts are screams, grimaces, covering faces with hands, or being compelled to look away. The level of amusement experienced is tested against the level of individual sensibility.

ET3C 'verbal' performances similarly test individual members of an audience to experience humour from a challenging performance. However, this does not mean that a performance in the grouping will be based on 'sick' or bad taste joking material, although they can be. Tony Allen is the example of this performance grouping. As was mentioned in chapter two, Allen is uncompromising in his intellectualisation of live performance humour. He is not concerned to sacrifice his exploration of the boundaries of humour as a performance art form, for what he sees as the banal expectations of audiences who are not able to appreciate what he is doing. His refusal to redeem himself with an audience that does not appreciate his performance, by resorting to joking material that would be more likely to be funny to the audience, often forces the performance to collapse and therefore fail to be humorously successful. ET3C 'verbal' performances are, therefore, characteristically strongly committed to an exploration of (un)successful live performance humour through experimentation with form and content that is aimed to challenge audiences, and the challenge can be artistic, rather than strive to be directly offensive with 'sick'/bad taste joking material.

Mr. Methane is the example of ET2C performances. He is a small man with a slight stature, who appears on stage wearing a green nylon body suit, a mask and a cape as in comic book superhero garb. He has a small table placed on centre stage which he uses to lie on his back on and pull his legs back so that his knees are behind his ears and his bottom is in prominent profile to the audience. He then begins a performance which is based upon an elaborate and remarkably controlled display of flatulence. He farts dialogue, national anthems, punctuates musical pieces like Strauss's Blue Danube and blows plumes of talcum powder

into the air. However, once the essential content of his act has been communicated to an audience, his performances do not do anything significantly different to challenge an audience. The level of circumspection in the scope of performative variation to test the sensibilities of an audience with different content and/or stylistic strategies, is a key factor separating ET2C from ET3C performances.

Gary Skyner is the example of ETI performances. He is a victim of the drug Thalidomide and has two very short arms as a result. He is able to hold a microphone, which he does in his performances. He tells jokes, gags and one-liners like a 'mainstream' stand-up performer, however, the content emphasis of the joking material relates primarily to himself as a 'Thid'. He is not a 'mainstream' performer because his joking material is designed specifically to carry the potential to disturb members of an audience, even though references appear to be vouchsafed by his obvious authentication of their use. The language he uses to describe people with physical disabilities, such as himself, develops conservative category-routinised references to an extreme and potentially disconcerting level, and his use of running jokes based on his experience of difficulties he encounters with intimate activities such as masturbation and cleaning himself after using the toilet, may challenge members of an audience to question whether or not they should be laughing at such material. Skyner's performances are ET1 typical of the 'extreme' type because of the essential thematic structure of the performances, which is to deliberately present an audience with issues that characteristically test the boundaries of acceptable joking material in an emphatically familiar stand-up joke-telling form.

Roy 'Chubby' Brown is the example of ET2M performances. In performance he dresses in a comical costume that consists of a claw-hammer dinner jacket and matching trousers that reach just below the knee. This suit is a patchwork of outrageously vibrant colours and is worn with short white socks and old brown shoes. He always wears a brown leather skull cap of the type worn by First World War fighter pilots, with the accompanying goggles pushed up onto his

forehead. He sings extremely bawdy songs and dances comically to add variation to telling jokes and gags. His joking material is based on a relentless exploitation of dominant discriminatory cultural stereotypes of women, gays and ethnic groups in particular, and the jokes and gags he uses are graphically explicit, especially in their sexual content. He attracts large audiences to see him perform, although his pre-production billing always carries the proviso that people who are easily offended should stay away. Brown represents ET2M performances in that he intentionally develops established 'mainstream' conservative category-routinised joking material to a point that will on occasion be regarded as being too extreme for some members of his audiences to appreciate humorously.[4] This is a main point of difference with ET1 performances whose extreme joking material is not derived fundamentally from depersonalised exchangeable category-routinised references.

Bernard Manning is the example of ET3M performances. In performance he dresses conservatively in either a casual shirt and slacks, or more formally in a suit and tie, depending on the venue setting and the occasion of the performance. He is an archetypal stand-up comedian in his style, which involves very little movement on stage and a constant supply of gags and jokes being told into a hand held microphone. His joking material is built upon the same category-routinised frames of reference in the same verbal joke-teller style that defines 'mainstream' stand-up performers. Hence, he does share performance similarities with 'mainstream' type performers which place him, and the ET3M grouping he represents, close to the 'mainstream' type. However, Manning is not a 'mainstream' type performer, because the thematic content of his performances is 'extreme' in the way it develops joking material within established category-routinised frames of reference. For example, ethnic stereotype references are pushed concertedly and uncompromisingly to a highly charged frame of racial bigotry, which he will defend unconscionably both on and off stage. At one point in a performance at the South Pier in Blackpool, in 1992, he stopped telling his joking material on 'Japs' and explained to the audience in a serious and sincere speech, why he hated the 'little yellow bastards' so much. Manning's

emphatic commitment to the joking references of his performances is a clear indication that they are within the thematic base of the 'extreme' type. Therefore, while ET3M performers share performative similarities with 'mainstream' type performances, they are not sufficiently substantial to undermine their location within a grouping in the 'extreme' type: a grouping that is more likely to be less appealing to more people because of the extreme nature of the joking content of the performances.

Back to 'mainstream' (MT3E and MT2E) performances

Ned Kelly is the example of MT3E performances. He uses joking material that fully exploits category-routinised content references, but not to a point where they represent a characteristic commitment on the part of the performer. His gags and one-liners are readily reproachable with charges of sexism, racism, homophobia etc., and are recognisable as established 'mainstream' joking themes based on dominant cultural stereotypes. However, while the joking material may test the sensibilities of members of an audience, the thematic structure of the type locates the performances within a grouping that is regarded as simply striving to make people laugh, rather than communicate an extreme commitment on the part of the performer in terms of either a political agenda or personal beliefs. The joking content of MT3E performances is at a distance from the performer, as jokes and gags revert to their 'mainstream' characteristic of being stock exchangeable self-contained units of humour that are more universally acceptable as joking references, and are noticeably less close to a performer in their personal commitment to them, as is the content of ET3M performances. Kelly's work is described as 'really crude, but funny' by members of his audiences, who are given an immediate indication of the content of his act when he walks on stage stark naked holding his clothes on a coat hanger - he begins his joking material with a comment about not being given much time to get ready and dresses as the performance proceeds.

Ellie Laine is the example of MT2E performances. She and her work have already been described in chapter two, but the main point to make with this example is that she illustrates the thematic difference between the three type categories. While the content of her work is based largely on similarly explicit sexual joking material to that of Jenny Eclair, a CT3E performer, which refers to female sexual behaviour and the inadequacies of men in terms of ego and sexual physicality, she is not acknowledged by members of her audiences as being performatively aware of sexual politics. This is largely because of the distance of the joking material from her as a performer, which is mainly stylistically imposed by factors such as her physical appearance which she exploits to develop punchline gags and one-liners in the content of her performances. This is to say that Laine, as a 'mainstream' performer, uses her beauty and her revealingly dressed full-figured female form to develop conservative gender stereotype references that aim to try to shock members of her audiences to get laughs. She is representative of performances in this 'mainstream' type grouping, in that her performances are characteristic of the 'mainstream' type given that her joking material is more standardised joke/punchline, and they do not have the thematic structure to support them with a credible defence from criticism targeted at conservative category-routinised joking references. Consequently, as a MT2E performer, Laine is not accredited as being a female performer of 'radical' joking material, as Eclair is within the thematic structure of the 'circuit' type, even though they both use similar joking content references in their performances.

Conclusion

The detail of the performances given as examples of sectional type category groupings in the chapter, is designed to illustrate and confirm the range of performance variation in the form of live performance humour that is the subject of the thesis. With the subject of the study established, the thesis can proceed to address the aim of the study, which is to undertake a sociological investigation into (un)successful live performance humour. Hence the following two chapters

are to be developed to show the influence of setting/context (in chapter four) and audience (in chapter five) in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. The contribution of the work put forward in this and the previous chapter is to allow performances that are to be named in the chapters to come, to be referenced immediately to a coded system of classification that can identify the essential characteristics of each type of performance precisely. It is a fundamental requirement of the thesis to be able to identify particular performances precisely from such a wide subject group, as the basis of an understanding of the significance of a venue setting and a 'live' audience on the (un)successfulness of a particular performance will require the detail of the particular performance to be provided.

Chapter Four

Context/Social Context: A much-used term which is employed in two major ways: first, it may refer to the immediate and specific features of a social situation or environment that surrounds a particular interaction or communicative interchange; second, and in a more generally encompassing sense, it may be used to describe those wider social, political and historical circumstances and conditions within which certain actions, processes or events are located and made meaningful. In both cases the term serves to direct attention towards the not necessarily visible, but none the less determining forces which constitute and regulate social activity.

(O'Sullivan, et al., 1983, p.53)

The aim of this chapter is to show that the venue setting in which live performance humour takes place is a significant influence in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. It aims to show that the particular time of a particular performance in a particular venue setting, constitutes a definitive social context that must be considered in a sociological study of the (un)successfulness of live performance humour. In order to achieve this aim, the first part of the chapter will distinguish the definition of social context as it is being used here to refer to venue settings for live performance humour, from the more general sociological usage that refers mostly to common perceptions of the (in)appropriateness of humour in different social situations (Mulkay, 1988; Palmer, 1994). To do this, factors associated with the physical and social structures of the social context of a venue setting, as well as issues of performance, audience and contextual cues, will be put forward to establish a venue setting for live performance humour as an unequivocally appropriate social context for humorous communication.

> To truly understand the significance of an utterance it becomes necessary to study the context in which the communication act is embedded - namely ... "the relation of an utterance to its physical, social and linguistic contexts of use ..." (p.36), and how it functions as communication within these contexts.
>
> (Price-williams and Sabsay, 1979, cited in Sweidle, 1989)

The second part of the chapter will provide a comparative illustration of the different factors involved in the physical and social structures of a venue setting,

and show how they combine with features of performance and audience to form the specific social context of a particular venue setting. Eight different categories of venue setting have been studied and are referred to throughout the chapter (and the thesis) using their familiar names; these are, theatre, comedy club, pier, fringe, cabaret, public house, working men's club, and college venues. Data collected from fieldwork undertaken in these venue setting categories, and from a review of relevant literature, will be used to detail a variety of different venue settings selected from each of the eight categories, in order to demonstrate the influence of social context in the production of (un)successful live performance humour.

Part I: Venue as the appropriate social context

Fine (1983), in discussing the lack of research by sociologists into humour compared to that produced by their contemporaries within the fields of psychology, states that the sociologist should typically examine the social context of humour, and that 'although this generalization does not apply to all types of humor research in sociology, at the very least the social context must implicitly be taken into account' (p.159). He argues that psychological studies of humour have typically studied humour in the artificial surroundings of the laboratory, employing experimental stimuli and measuring their effect upon enlisted 'subjects'. As a result, the main variable in this approach is that of subject response, which means that the social situation of humour is not fully addressed and, therefore, remains largely unknown. However, although Fine does stress the importance of the social situation in which humour occurs, he is referring to 'situation' more in terms of the (in)appropriateness of humour as a form of social action in a particular social situation. Consequently, while he is able to use culturally relative examples of specific social situations, such as funerals and examinations, to illustrate the importance of social context to determine the (in)appropriateness of humour in a particular social situation, he is not able to show that all social situations are as equally well defined as the examples he gives, as determining social contexts for the (in)appropriateness of

humour. Whereas funerals and examinations can be put forward as substantive examples of social situations that normatively sanction a 'serious mode' of conduct (Mulkay, 1988), they cannot defend the definition of social context they are based upon from being criticised for a lack of specificity that allows mistakes to be made about the (in)appropriateness of finding things funny in a particular social situation. This is to say that this definition of social context allows for individuals to find themselves in ambiguous social situations because of their uncertainty as to whether the intention of a communication was to be funny or serious in that context. Schaeffer (1981) argues that in order for the ambiguity to occur, the social context is not sufficiently determinate to indicate to participants that it is either a humorous or a serious situation, and this causes individual participants to be unsure of how to react to the communication.

> The question completely stated is as follows: if the incongruity I have just perceived is not just a slip or some other unconscious construction, but is in fact intended, does it have a limited serious significance which you mean me to discover, or have I the freedom to discover whatever significance I can that makes me laugh? We feel secure about laughing when we know that we were intended to laugh at something and that everyone else is laughing too. On the other hand, we feel uncomfortable when we find ourselves laughing when no one else is, or when we discover upon second thought that our having laughed may have been inappropriate.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, pp.17-18)

The point that such mistakes and ambiguity can arise in some social situations highlights the immediate point of difference with the definition of social context as it is now being used in this thesis to refer to venue settings for live performance humour. This is because an unmistakably clear signal is given by a venue setting that it is an entirely appropriate social situation for the participants in it to find things funny, and indeed, entirely inappropriate for them to take things seriously in that context. The social context of a venue setting, therefore refers to a particular place and time that is emphatically and purposefully designated as an appropriate social situation for humour. And given that a venue setting is geared to the production of humour for profitable commercial goals as well as artistic ambitions,[1] then it is a social context that unequivocally signals the humorous intention of the performative communication within it.

Schaeffer argues it is the signalling of humorous intention that effectively defines a social context for humorous discourse. He states that 'contextual inappropriate-ness' is signalled by the absence of cues which indicate a 'ludicrous context' that prepares people to find something funny.

> I do not think that it is possible to categorize all of the stylistic devices and cueing mechanisms that belong to the ludicrous context. A device might be as simple as a blatant cue: "Here is a joke." Or it could be as delicate as a subtle nuance of tone. While it appears impossible to generalize about the various cueing mechanisms that define the ludicrous context, we can in broad terms discuss their effect, which is to prepare our mind for the pleasurable irrelevancies that characterize the outcome of our mental work upon incongruities in a ludicrous context.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.22)

A venue setting for live performance humour is put forward as an immensely effective 'cueing mechanism' to 'define a ludicrous context'. This further refines the definition of the term social context as it applies here; to refer to specific cues to a ludicrous context that is specifically constructed around the staged production of live performance humour. It is not a definition that incorporates everyday social situations in which humour is perceived to be (in)appropriate by individuals participating in the social situation.

The 'cueing context' of a particular venue setting involves a range of factors associated with the social context of the venue setting, that work to position individuals as participants in a social situation in which they are aware of the roles and relationships they are expected to engage in. Brelby and Harrington (cited in Cruz and Lewis, (eds.), 1994) refer to this as an 'idioculture', which consists of, 'knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs that group members can refer to and use as the basis for subsequent interaction' (p.83). This is to say that a venue setting not only acts as an effective cueing mechanism to a ludicrous context, it also provides directive cues to social role identifications and expectations of participants as individual members of an audience, or indeed, as live performers of humour. However, the idiocultures of different venue settings vary greatly, and very different sets of roles and relationships exist. This means that some venue settings have characteristically passive, disciplined and attentive

audiences to a performance, while others have characteristically more active, less disciplined and less attentive audiences to a performance. While the range of factors giving rise to these differences, and the influence they have on the success of live performance humour, will be detailed in the second part of the chapter, the important point being made now is that a venue setting for live performance humour has specific cueing mechanisms, that are not prevalent in everyday social situations in which a humorous context is established, to define both a performance of humour and an audience to a performance of humour.

One of the cueing mechanisms of the type of theatrical performance that is associated with a venue setting for live performance humour, is that a performance is recognised as such by a distinct level of preparation by a performer. Hogg and Abrams (1988) acknowledge that a level of preparation is an essential part of the definition of performance. They confirm this in their assertion that 'performers aim to project an image of competence in the presence of others' (p.125). Palmer (1994) refers to this projected image of competence in his definition of comic performance when he refers to 'performance skills', and the intention of the performer to 'arouse laughter' from their application (p.161). Hymes (1975) identifies performance as 'cultural behaviour for which a person assumes responsibility to an audience' (cited in Carlson, 1996, p.42). That which is authentically recognised as a live performance of humour is defined primarily by the informed expectations of individuals who expect to be humorously entertained as members of an audience. Carlson (1996) argues, 'audience certainly plays a key role in most attempts to define performance' (p.15), and that which is recognised as a performance is based 'upon a relationship between a performer and an audience'(p.38). It therefore becomes necessary to identify the cueing mechanisms that effectively define the constituent features of what is equally authentically recognised as an audience to a performance. This is a difficult task that involves a range of issues that will be developed in chapter five. However, one key feature put forward by Carlson that can be identified as a cueing mechanism to define individuals as members of an

audience, is that individuals hold a set of expectations that motivate them to arrange their social calendar, spend money and travel to attend a venue setting.

> [the] conscious choice of people to gather for this particular kind of embodied activity, and the expectation of what kind of experience this will be, are equally important
>
> (Carlson, 1996, p.197)

It is accepted that what is authentically recognised as an audience varies accordingly with the basis of what is authentically recognised as performance, and what the relationship between performer and audience is, or is expected to be. The important point is that the recognition of an audience, a performance, and the relationship between them, is significantly influenced by the cueing mechanisms associated with the social context of the venue setting in which they are based. Some settings, for example, provide a social context in which normative conventions and expectations are that the audience will be active rather than passive. This is where the audience is acknowledged as being directly involved in the production of the performance through various interactive means, such as dialogic exchanges in the form of heckling, banter and repartee for example, to more conceptual processes of interpretation and decoding of meanings contained within the text of a performance. As Rutter argues, the audience's position is that of 'co-author with the performer in the textual dialogue of performance'.

> Working together, the performer and audience bring a network of humorous and non-humorous influences to inform and enliven their interpretations.
>
> (Rutter, 1996, p.315)

However, in other venue settings, such as a theatre for example, the behaviour of individuals is required to conform to social roles and social relationships that are defined by the context, such as the role of being a passive member of an audience in a relationship that is highly attentive to the action of a performance. These roles are compounded by conventional, ceremonial and ritual factors associated with this venue setting that work as cueing mechanisms to establish a

uniformity to participants' roles, without assuming there is a motivational or cognitive unity of members of the audience.[2] In may attend a venue setting for a variety of reasons; to other words, individuals see friends, to meet people, to drink alcohol, or to do research, but they become a member of what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) call a 'simple' audience in that their conduct is made relatively predictable to other members of the audience by the influence of physical, social, ceremonial, ritual and institutional factors associated with the social context of the venue setting.

> The uniformity of behaviour that typifies interaction in an institutional setting does not imply psychological uniformity among the participants. Nor does the fact that institutions are shared by members of a socio-cultural system mean that cognitions are shared. ... In any interaction it is not essential that cognitions or motives be shared; it is only necessary that the conduct of each actor is relatively negotiable and predictable.
>
> (Brittan, 1973, p.197)

It is because of the absence of venue setting context cues that individuals in their social group do not consider themselves to be either a member of an audience or a performer in everyday humorous social situations. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) identify 'social distance' as a significant factor in the clarification of the roles (and relationship) of performer and audience member in a theatrical setting. In so doing they clearly separate theatrical definitions of performance and audience from Goffmanesque sociological definitions of performance in everyday social interaction. They argue there are different rules to different instances of performance, and theatrical performances, which occupy a public space and are characterised by a sense of social distance where 'performers acquire a mystique which separates them from the ordinary lives of the audience. They are a separate order of beings inhabiting an extra-mundane world' (p.42). The social separation of performers and audiences in a theatrical (venue) setting is, 'reinforced by the manner in which the former inhabit an extra-mundane world. In the theatre setting, for example, social distance derives from the social status of actors' (p.48). Abercrombie and Longhurst identify a variety of means by which performers can derive a significant status to maintain a social distance between themselves and an audience - such as material rewards, stardom, the

physical separation of performers (occupying a performance space) from the audience and the 'aura' of the performance (p.49). The social status of a performer in a theatrical definition is, therefore, predicated on the aforementioned specific factors associated with the context of a venue setting, which further emphasise the preferred definitions of performer/performance and social context as they are being used here. This is because the factors giving rise to the performative status of live performers of humour in the social context of a venue setting, are not present in the 'performances' of social actors in the social context of everyday social interaction.

As a direct correlation of the cueing of roles and relationships within a venue setting, there is an effective cue to individual members of an audience to live performance humour to find humorous meanings in the communications of a performance. In other words, as a direct result of an effective combination of cues there is a normative pressure exerted in a venue setting to find things funny rather than offensive. Such a combination of cues does not exist outside of a venue setting to exert a comparable normative pressure to that of the venue setting, there is less constraint on individuals in an everyday situation not to be offended, or at least to appreciate a communication humorously. While individuals in a joking relationship in a social group may commit a faux pas by making a joke at the wrong time in the wrong place; where the context may be wrong for joking, for example, or unwittingly joke about a particular topic that is regarded as a mistake by others in the group who appreciate the offence or upset it can cause to some in the group, the emphatic signal of the venue setting as a humorous context delimits offence by locating references within a recognisable performance text to an audience that expects to be humorously entertained by the performance. Indeed, part of the cueing context of a venue setting is to shape the expectations of the audience which contribute significantly to the normative pressure within a venue setting to find things funny.

As is established in chapter two, the reputation of a performer can directly affect the composition of an audience, and different 'types' of performers utilise

different venue settings. Consequently, venue settings become broadly identified with certain types of live performance humour and, therefore, the combination of performer reputation and a knowledge of the type of performances that are characteristic of a venue setting, produce sets of expectations in an audience. This is not to say that all members of an audience will hold the same expectations. Those who are sufficiently motivated to incur the expense and organise themselves to travel to a particular place at a given time for the sole purpose of a particular performance, can readily be regarded as having high expectations of pleasurable humorous entertainment from the performance they expect to see, and are therefore, more likely to appreciate the performance and find things funny. However, some members of the same audience, who may be in attendance for other reasons such as simply going along to be with their friends, may not expect to be humorously entertained. Indeed, their knowledge of performer reputation and/or the venue setting may add to their low expectations of being humorously entertained as a member of the audience. In some venue settings individuals may not be in attendance for the sole purpose of the performance of humour. Individual members of an audience in a working men's club, for example, could be in the setting for a variety of reasons such as drinking, meeting friends, playing bingo, seeing a band that is on the same bill as the 'comedian', or they could be there in an official capacity as a member of the club committee, or there because they always go to the club on that night of the week as a regular club member (see chapter six). Nevertheless, in a working men's club, as in any venue setting for live performance humour, the contextual cues exist to identify audience and performer; and a vital part of the audience's identification of a performance is being able to recognise joking references as part of a performative text. Outside of the performance text in a venue setting, joking references do not have the contextual cues to authenticate them as indefatigably humorous in their appreciable intention to produce a successful performance.

Palmer (1994) acknowledges that professional performers are able to succeed with the same joking material that causes offence when used by individuals

outside of the social context of the performance. Indeed, some performers have established their comic reputation on the basis of using 'offensive' joking material in their acts, and have become highly successful in terms of their evident appeal, which enables them to perform at large theatre venues and attract capacity audiences (Schwartz, 1998). The way individual members of an audience know of a particular performer may be based on the reputation of a venue setting to present a 'type' of performance, or the reputation of a performer, or knowledge of a performer through media such as radio, television and video, and this knowledge informs expectations of a performance. Some performers, who accept that an audience will expect their performances, will develop their performances accordingly, in order to fulfil the type of humorous entertainment they perceive their audiences expect, which serves to confirm audience expectations strengthening the reputation of the performer. The expectations an audience have of a performance are subject to further confirmation from what Bennett (1990) refers to as 'pre-production' (p.145). An integral part of pre-production is the publicity billing used to advertise a performer. Roy 'Chubby' Brown, for example, (an ET2M performer) has, 'if easily offended stay away' printed on his advertising posters, like an exclusion clause in a contract that clearly defines the terms of the agreement between audience and performer, both in the intention of the performer and the expectations of the performance by an audience. The agreement is simple; either accept the humorous intention of the performance text or do not attend the performance.

While there are performers within each of the type categories that do use joking material that could be considered to be offensive by some members of an audience, there is a significant difference in the nature of the 'offensiveness' of the joking material used by different type performers. The offensiveness perpetrated by Bernard Manning as an ET3M performer can be perceived on a more generalisable philosophical level of moral or political principle on the basis of the references they use that are charged as sexist, racist or homophobic, for example.[3] Other performers generate a perceptible degree of offensiveness on a more privatised level by pursuing performative success from material, that, while

containing 'extreme' themes of sexist, racist and other out-grouping references, is aimed more at personally insulting individual members of an audience. An example of such performances is an ET2M performer called Joey Blower. He performs each year through the high season (the Illuminations) in a large public house called the 'Merry England' in Blackpool, a large seaside holiday resort in North West England. The 'Merry England' venue setting is designed to cater for holiday revellers with features such as a dance floor, stage, lighting, a sophisticated sound system and a compere/DJ. Blower opens his act singing a popular Jeff Beck song that has had the lyrics changed to incite the audience to chant abuse at him. Instead of singing, 'Hi Ho Silver lining' the audience is encouraged to sing heartily, 'Hi Ho You fat bastard'. This signals to the audience the pitch of the performance text, which is certainly confirmed as soon as the song ends and Blower immediately targets individual members of the audience for unfettered personal insult and abuse. In the first five minutes of his act he starts to single out individuals to take up on to the stage in order to attack them unreservedly with outrageously personal remarks. On one occasion a young woman celebrating her impending marriage with about a dozen female friends was chosen for such an assault. First, from the stage, Blower utilised an obviously well rehearsed script of extremely graphic references to venomously illustrate how ugly he thought she was, and proclaim how he regarded the prospect of having to have sex with her as utterly appalling. This was appreciably humorously successful with the audience, and noticeably so with the young woman and her friends. He then left the stage to walk over to the woman in order to take her by the hand and lead her back to the stage. Once he had her up on the stage with him, he continued to spitefully attack her physical appearance, her personal hygiene, how rotten a person she was, and how she would never be so lucky again as to find someone who must obviously be such a 'pathetic arsehole' to agree to marry her. All the while this woman made a concerted effort to show that she was having a good time, and that she was entering into the spirit of the performance just like her friends and the rest of the audience who obviously found the joking references to be funny. After four to five minutes of this abuse the young woman was sent from the stage with a bottle

of wine and a request for a round of applause. Even as she walked back to her seat he continued to chide her as a 'real dog' and a 'waste of a bottle of Kwik Save piss'. The hilarity continued when Blower identified a small white haired old woman in the audience whom he promptly brought on to the stage. Once again he lambasted her with virulent comments that centred on her age, and in addition to this he humiliated her with exaggerated gestures of impatience and by shouting at her patronisingly in order to exploit an ageist presumption of her hearing impairment. The woman looked bewildered as Blower shouted into the microphone he was holding next to her ear, 'what are doing here love?' She winced at his bellowing voice and before she could answer he shouted, 'you should be dead by now you old cunt' (laughter). This laughingly vouchsafed humorous performance went on for another twenty minutes after the old woman left the stage, with many other audience members being targeted.

What Blower and many other performers like him do to gain their reputation of being 'offensive', is to level personal insults indiscriminately at individuals in the audience. Yet, as the performative success of Blower shows, from a recognised performer in the particular context of a recognised venue setting, the often brutal personal abuse is not accepted as being genuinely offensive by the majority of members of an audience, which it must undoubtedly be if uttered in a different social situation outside of such a recognisably humorous performance context (Margolis, 1996). Hence the assurance with which Bernard Manning can single out a young woman with large breasts sitting next to her partner in his audience and say, "she's got a lovely pair of tits. I like making her laugh so I can see her tits wobble. Christ I wouldn't mind shagging her etc. etc.", and both her and her partner remain seated, and be amused and not offended, is an obvious indication of the influence of the social context in the production of live performance humour, as it is difficult to think of a comparable everyday social context where such utterances can be made by someone without causing offence (Purdie, 1993).

A venue setting for live performance humour thus provides a social context that actively promotes a clear recognition of a performance by an audience. This allows for joking references to be authenticated by their location in a performance text which establishes the intentionality of the references to produce a successful humorous performance to an expectant audience. This is to say that an identifiable performance text can effectively depersonalise the impact of insults and critical personal remarks that are textually framed as authentic joking references for the purpose of pleasure and humour. While the success of 'extreme' type performers like Blower and Manning and indeed numerous performers from each of the three type categories, is a clear indication that the majority of individuals in an audience will accept the mitigation of 'offensive' material contained within the performance text in context, it must be noted that such performers do on occasion fail to be accepted humorously. Failures range from members of an audience becoming generally inattentive to a performance, to pointedly showing their emphatic disapproval directly to the performer. Members of an audience may, for example, shout their dissatisfaction at a performer, leave the auditorium during a performance, act in a manner that causes a performer to leave the stage prematurely, or, in the extreme, physically attack the performer on stage or after their performance as they leave the venue.[4]

In addition to the cueing mechanisms of a venue setting for live performance humour, the interactive dynamics of the social group that forms an audience to a performance have been identified as being a significant factor to the success of any type of live performance humour. Malpass and Fitzpatrick (1959) found that laughter increases in group situations. Calvert (1949) claims that,

> It is also reasonable to assume that even when the material presented is found unfunny by an individual but occasions uproarious laughter in others, this group laughter may exert pressure to conform.
>
> (cited in Martin and Gray, 1996, p.222)

McGhee (1979) argues people, and especially women, tend to 'amplify their overt response to humour' because 'laughter at others' jokes (even when they are unfunny) is one means of ensuring continued liking and acceptance by others'

(cited in Martin and Gray, 1996, p.228). Giles and Oxford (1970) claim individuals laugh as a direct consequence of other members of the group laughing, and that while individuals may well find a communication funny, it is because they can hear other people laughing they can show their amusement in laughing out loudly (cited in Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington, 1974, p.531). Young and Fyre (1966) also found that laughing out loud increases in a group situation, yet it is not clear whether people laugh out loud because of the social context they are in, or whether other people laughing has a facilitative effect which could amount to the laughter of others being itself an additional source of amusement.

The underlying point of these various research references is summed up by Smyth and Fuller (1972) who argue that if someone else is laughing then social conformity makes others think that it must also be funny (p.134). However, these references do not relate specifically to a group situation that is definitively an audience in the context of a venue setting. Rather they refer to a 'social group' in general terms, which could apply equally to friends, associates or any group of people who are involved in an everyday social situation. This suggests that the same pressures to conform to finding things funny will apply equally to groups in everyday social situations as they would to an audience in a venue setting.

> the individual is expected to laugh in a group of laughers. Laughter creates social reverberations that sustain and enhance it; as Henri Bergson puts it, "Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo" (1956:64). Group members scowl at whoever refuses to provide this echo - the nonlaugher in their midst - whom they regard as antisocial.
>
> (Davis, 1993, p.149)

Research shows there are significant differences between the social group as an audience in a venue setting and a social group in an everyday situation. First, group pressure exerted on members of an audience to overtly express humorous appreciation in a venue setting, is supported by context specific factors such as cueing mechanisms and favourable expectations of the performance. Secondly,

a performance given in a venue setting will probably involve a larger social grouping as an audience, than would usually be the case for someone joking to a group of friends or colleagues in an everyday situation. Morrison (1940) argues there is a positive correlation between the size of audience and the number of laughs per performance (cited in Smyth and Fuller, 1972, p.132). Andrus (1946, cited in Martin and Gray, 1996) points out that the larger the audience, the more its members tend to laugh, while Holland (1982) emphasises the smaller the audience the fewer the laughs. Cook (1994) makes the claim that, 'comedy only thrives in crowded rooms' (p.248). Thirdly, group pressure to laugh along with others as members of an audience has a connotative effect of signifying the venue as an enhanced social context for humour. Once some members of an audience start to laugh, the performer benefits from the cueing of laughter from others in the audience. Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington state,

> The laughter of others may simply act as a situational cue which conditions the listener to search for a humorous interpretation of the material, directing the perceiver to "see the funny side" of things.
>
> (Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington, 1974, p.534)

Fourthly, group pressure to laugh out loud in a venue setting provides encouragement to a performer who is able to apply competent performative skills to initially generate laughter in the audience. On the basis of the laughter initially generated, a performer has the advantage of the group dynamics in the audience to increase the potential to establish and maintain a humorous momentum to the performance.

> Indeed, once we begin laughing at a series of ludicrous incongruities we may be made to laugh at anything. It is said that a successful comedian who has his audience rolling with laughter can read the telephone directory with humorous effect.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.18)

Palmer (1994) argues that such a humorous momentum can be exploited by competent performers who have the necessary skills to be able to 'pick a good moment for delivery' and to 'time' their material to fit in with the responses of

the audience. Mangham and Overington (1987) put forward a definition of 'timing' that supports Palmer's in that they also emphasise the ability of a performer to work 'a performance around an audience's responses, seeking to elicit particular responses .... an interplay with the actual audience' (p.87).

By using these four points to illustrate the difference between the supplementary and facilitative effects on laughter exerted by social group pressure in the different social contexts of venue settings and everyday social situations, specific features associated with the social group as an audience in a venue setting have been identified as having positive effects on the generation of laughter. However, this does not mean there is an assured impetus to the success of live performance humour exerted by the social context of a venue setting. It must be recognised that while the social context of a venue setting may be accepted as having a positive impact on the production of successful live performance humour, it can only be accepted within the confines of a specific consideration of the particular social context of a particular venue setting. This is to say that some venue settings are characterised by a particular combination of factors that promote group dynamics within an audience that can work against the production of successful live performance humour. For example, working men's clubs have a particular combination of factors, which are detailed in chapter six, that can work to fragment the attentive viewing of an audience. In this setting an audience is broken into numerous smaller social groups of friends with their own isolatable group dynamics. This can, and often does, result in groups within a working men's club concert room audience talking and generating their own entertainment, which obviously detracts from the attentive viewing of a performance by the individuals in the group. There is also a heightened probability that others in such an audience, especially those close to the errant group(s), may be distracted from a performance. Indeed, performers I have interviewed, who work regularly and successfully in the working men's clubs, have spoken about the range of difficulties such localised group fragmentation of an audience can cause, and the manner in which they can adversely affect the humorous impact of a performance (See chapter six and Appendix 2, note 1).

Localised group fragmentation of an audience does not only occur in the working men's club venue setting category. Such fragmentation can result from individual members of an audience holding a broader range of entertainment expectations to that of live performance humour, and that this diversity of expectation is not exclusively the product of institutional factors that are particular to working men's clubs. Jo Brand, a CT3M performer, illustrates this point with a reference to 'student gigs' in college venue settings,

> Because they either don't pay to get in or they pay very little, and they're quite young, and are more interested in drinking and getting off with each other, they don't feel they have any obligation to listen or to treat you with any respect.
>
> (cited in Cook, 1994, p.152)

Steve Punt, a writer and CT3M performer, reiterates Brand's point on performing to students in a college venue setting,

> gigs are hard where the audience aren't really there to see the comedian. For example, an act could go well at a Comedy Club because the people had queued up and paid because they want to watch comedy, compared to, for example, a college event where people have paid to dance and get off with each other, not to watch a comedian.
>
> (cited in Cook, 1994, p.175)

Localised groups and individuals with extraneous motivations within an audience do have a detrimental effect on the condition of an audience in relation to the level of attentive viewing of a performance, hence it becomes necessary to use the term audience with some caution and ask what actually constitutes an audience. While this question will be addressed fully in chapter five, it is sufficient to meet the aim of this chapter to acknowledge that the extent to which individuals gathered for a performance are disposed to attentively listen to or view a performance varies markedly from one venue setting to another. This is because different venue settings have different combinations of factors that determine them as a social context characterised by more or less disciplined audiences.

While these factors will now be discussed in the second part of the chapter, the first part has aimed to establish a venue setting for live performance humour as a definitively appropriate social context for a humorous mode of communication between a performer and an audience. It has been shown that a venue setting contains specific cueing mechanisms to identify it as a specific social context in which a social grouping of people authentically recognise themselves as an audience to what is authentically recognised as a performance. It has been shown that although an individual in his or her social group may joke successfully to others in the group, the success of their joking will depend largely upon whether it is a suitable social context to do so. Yet even in a suitable social context for joking, recipients of jokes from friends do not identify themselves as an audience in a way that is comparable to the definition of audience that applies to a theatrical venue setting for live performance humour. Joke-tellers in an everyday social situation do not identify their friends and associates in terms of a theatrical definition of audience, and neither do they see their joking as a performance on any significant level that equates with the theatrical definitions of performance that have been given in relation to venue setting. Therefore, although an everyday social context for humour relies heavily on cues to determine the success of humorous communication between individuals in a social group, it does not provide the necessary cues for individuals in that group to recognise themselves as forming an audience to a performance, or to have themselves recognised as being a live performer.

Part II: Factor formation and influence of venue setting social contexts

Hartley (1993) notes that any social context can be broken down into two main factors which he identifies as, environment and social structure. The environment is the actual setting or background, which involves both physical and social elements. The social structure relates to the way in which a particular event is organised and undertaken. He argues that for any social situation there is a set number of rules and norms which govern behaviour, and it is these which

are inherent within the social structure. Thus, the two main elements of a social context can be broken down as such:

SOCIAL CONTEXT

SOCIAL STRUCTURE			ENVIRONMENT	
Social Norms	Social Rules	Social Relationships	Social Environment	Physical Environment

For Hartley, all of the different aspects of social context listed above, are identified as essential constituent parts of a complete definition of a social context. Therefore, in order to demonstrate different social contexts for live performance humour, each of these parts will be considered to show how they relate specifically to different venue settings in which live performance humour takes place. This will allow the constituent parts of Hartley's definition of social context to be used as direct points of comparison between different venue settings. For example, the physical environment of a theatre can be compared to the physical environment of venue settings in other categories, such as comedy clubs, college bars and public houses. In order to develop this comparative strategy effectively, a number of venue settings for live performance humour from each of the eight named categories being studied will be detailed. This material will be used to show how the constituent parts of different venue settings vary significantly, and combine to form a particular social context that directly effects the (un)successfulness of live performance humour taking place within the particular venue setting.

The main difficulty associated with the task of comparing the constituent parts of Hartley's definition of social context, as they apply to different venue settings, is that each of the parts contain a number of factors that must be examined individually in order to appreciate their specific contribution to the composition of a social context of a particular venue setting. For example, lighting, seating

(or lack of it) and performance space are individual factors that are associated with the physical environment of a venue setting, but to establish the significance of the physical environment of a venue setting to the social context of the venue setting, each individual 'physical' factor must be considered in order to first establish what the specific physical environment of a venue setting actually is. For example, every venue setting for live performance humour has a designated performance space which serves to physically direct audience attention as spectators. But, there is a marked difference between the performance space in a public house and a theatre: there are differences in the size of the space, the structure of (or indeed the absence of) a stage and the physical distance between performance and audience, and these are acknowledged as extremely important factors in shaping the behaviour of an audience. It is only by identifying the detail of individual factors associated with the constituent parts of a social context, that the essential relationship between the factors that apply specifically to a particular venue setting can be understood. Such an understanding is necessary for two reasons. First, it provides the basis to define precisely what the social context of live performance humour actually refers to within the parameters of the thesis. Secondly, it enables the social context of one venue setting to be comparatively differentiated from another, which is essential to demonstrate the influence of social context in the production of (un)successful live performance humour.

There are, however, problems associated with detailing individual factors in order to show the particular social context of different venue settings. One is the size of the range and number of factors associated with each venue setting. This is to say that although the individual factors constituting the social context of a venue setting can be identified, it is because the detail of each factor in each venue setting must be taken into account if the characteristic composition of a particular venue setting as a social context for live performance humour is to be identified, that the problem of being able to generalise about the social context of all of the venue settings in a category arises. Quite simply, the same individual factors associated with the constituent parts of the environment and social

structure of the social context of a venue setting, that vary sufficiently in detail and combination to identify a venue setting as belonging to a familiarly named category, can also carry sufficient differences in detail to establish significantly different social contexts in different venue settings within a category. For example, some comedy clubs can have characteristically active audiences that are very demanding of performers, while other comedy clubs have characteristically passive audiences that are very tolerant of performers.

A further problem associated with detailing individual factors of the social context of a venue setting, is that the factors can change over time, and can thus create a venue setting in the year 2001 that is a markedly different social context for live performance humour than it was 12 months or 12 years earlier. Again, this means it is not possible to establish a substantive definition of the social context of all venue settings located within a category. Therefore, rather than give a comprehensively detailed account of one venue setting in each category in order to represent the social context of all venue settings in the category, the individual factors involved in the construction of a particular social context of a particular venue setting will be documented. Accepting that the detail of individual factors and their particular combination relate specifically to the social context of a particular venue setting and not all venue settings in a category, the familiarly named categories will be used only as points of reference - labels to indicate different social contexts that exist for live performance humour. Consequently, the way in which a comparative illustration of different social contexts of different venue settings will be made, is for individual factors to be compared as they relate specifically to a particular venue setting. Detail of individual venue settings in different categories is, therefore, given to provide a comparative illustration of both the function of contextual factors and the way they can combine to form a particular social context that is a significant influence in the production of (un)successful live performance humour.

Physical environment

Hartley (1993) maintains that physical environment relates to all physical items and factors that are present within a social context, and that, 'all of these can influence our behaviour in ways we might not necessarily be aware of" (p.84). With regard to a venue setting, the physical environment refers to factors such as; the size of the venue, lighting, heating, seating, stage, and bar (alcohol) facilities. Hartley argues that the way in which the physical environment of a social context can influence audience behaviour may be in terms of either physical or symbolic effects. In a venue setting, physical effects could refer to an imperceptible decrease in the attentive viewing of the performance that may result from the discomfiture of overheating, or the nagging distraction of bright lights for example. Symbolic effects refer to significant contextual factors that may serve to engage individuals in the social context, such as a feeling of excitement aroused due to the grand physical surrounding of a theatre, or a feeling of anticipation generated by entering the contextual location of the venue setting in which a person's preferred choice of performance is to be given.

A single factor of the physical environment of a venue setting can have diverse physical effects upon the behaviour of individuals as members of an audience. Seating, for example, is a single factor that is pertinent to the physical environment of any venue setting for live performance humour, but the way in which seating is arranged, the type of seating, the price of seats, or indeed, whether there is a standing audience because no seating is provided, varies from one venue setting to another. Consequently, the physical effects of a single physical factor like seating vary from venue setting to venue setting. Theatres and piers, for example, have fixed rows of seats facing the stage, just like cinema seats facing the screen, and this has the physical effect of making it more awkward and unacceptable for members of an audience to converse or socialise with others during a performance. Seating of this kind therefore serves to focus a high level of attention on a performance by inducing a high level of physical passivity in the audience (Chaney, 1993; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998).

> Spectators are thus trained to be passive in their demonstrated behaviour during a theatrical performance, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available. Performers rely on the active decoding, but passive behaviour of the audience so that they can unfold the planned on-stage activity
> (Bennett, 1997, p. 206, cited in Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.54)

In comparison to a theatre setting, some venue settings, such as cabaret, working men's clubs and some comedy clubs, for example, have seating arranged around tables, primarily because of the physical factor of a bar in close proximity to the performance space, and the centrality of drinking alcohol in these settings as part of the evening's entertainment. A physical effect of seating around tables is to make it more conducive for members of an audience to converse and socialise, even during a performance. It also allows members a degree of flexibility which does not exist in theatre settings, to adjust the proximity of their seat to others, which Yates and Miller (1982) show effects the way in which people respond to humorous stimuli (Aiellio, Thompson and Brodzinsky, 1983). One other physical effect of the seating in these venues, is that seats have to be shifted around, or heads turned away from tables, in order for some members of the audience to view the performance space. This is a viewing posture that cannot physically direct audience attention to the performance. Hence seating is a single factor of the physical environment of the social context of a venue setting, that plays an important part in forming the overall condition of an audience as either more or less disciplined in terms of high or low attention to a performance. Steve Punt, a CT3M performer, argues that an audience without seating is the least disciplined and make it extremely difficult for live performance humour to succeed. He believes the 'cardinal rule of comedy' is 'don't put comedy on where the audience is standing up' (cited in Cook, 1994, p.175).

Lighting is a factor of the physical environment of every venue setting for live performance humour, and it can have both physical and symbolic effects on the behaviour of individuals as members of an audience. Theatre and pier venues, for example, lower the house lights in order to darken the auditorium, and this has the physical effect of setting a focus for audience attention on the lighted

proscenium arch stage. Before the curtain is raised to reveal the lighted stage, the darkening of the auditorium also has symbolic effects, such as signalling the imminent arrival of the anticipated performance, which therefore induces the culmination of pre-performance expectations. Darkening the auditorium in these venue settings also has the symbolic effect of signalling to the audience that it is time to observe the normative conventions of the venue setting. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) explain these conventions in terms of the historical development of ceremony and ritual associated with modern theatre, which demand the passive, sedentary, condensed, intense, silent and highly attentive viewing of the performance (pp.43-57). In comparison, the character of the lighting in relation to the audience and the performance space in some venue settings, such as some comedy clubs, public houses and college settings, for example, is not altered in any way for the commencement of a performance. As well as not experiencing a darkening of the room immediately prior to a performance, an audience in such a venue setting may not experience any form of supplementary lighting, such as a spotlight introduced onto the performance space to signify the start of a performance. In some venue settings in these categories, the balance of the level of lighting in relation to audience and performance space may be insufficient to clearly demarcate a performance space solely through such physical illumination. However, there are other physical factors such as the architecture of the setting, a recognisable stage and the obvious presentation of a performance, that work to establish a performance space that separates audience and performance.

While the level of lighting on both audience and performance space in some venue settings may remain constant throughout the duration of the evening, without any adjustment to correspond with the arrival and departure of performers, it is usual for venues for live performance humour to spotlight the performance space, even though the spotlight(s) may remain switched on all evening. A balance of constant lighting that highlights the performance space and places the audience into a relatively darkened space has the physical effect of imposing a social distance that will be shown to be highly significant to the

relationship between audience and performer. It also has the symbolic effect of creating an ambience that performers recognise as being conducive to successful humorous performance, albeit an ambience that has different connotations to different performers. Vic Reeves, for example, a CT1 performer, claims that 'people like to be in the dark to laugh' (cited in Cook, 1994, p.161), while Hugh Dennis, a CT3M performer, feels that in some venues 'You can see everyone in the audience and it's really disconcerting. You don't want to be able to see anyone at all' (cited in Cook, 1994, p.165). Although a balance of constant lighting does not produce the same symbolic ceremonial and ritual effects as variable lighting used in theatre settings, for example, the physical factor of variable lighting can be used to produce different symbolic effects in different venue settings. For example, during a performance of the Jim Rose Circus (an ET3C performance), all the lights in the fringe venue setting were lowered to put the whole place (including the stage) into extreme darkness. The aim of this radical alteration of the physical environment was to induce the symbolic effect of fear in members of the audience. This was done to heighten the performative impact of the show to frighten people in the audience, when several Circus performers came running into the abnormally dark auditorium wielding loudly revving chainsaws, seemingly just above the heads of the audience who could feel they were being sprayed with what they were being frantically told was petrol (water). The lighting blackout was used to increase the physical effect of fear of dreadful mutilation, that the performance was striving to create with a perceptibly dangerous invasion of audience space. The volume of screams and general commotion from the audience at this point of the performance suggested that these physical effects had been achieved.

The proximity of a bar selling alcohol to the performance space is a factor of the physical environment that is significant to the social context of a venue setting. The activities of members of an audience buying, and drinking alcohol close to the performance space can provide a level of distraction that significantly lowers audience attention to a performance. John Hegley, a CT1 performer, gave up performing in one venue setting because of the influence of the bar on the social

context of that setting, 'It's all to do with the context. I stopped performing at Jongleurs because I felt you were on par with the bar, really - part of a night out package' (cited in Cook, 1994, p.158). Further, the effects of drinking alcohol can effect the relationship between performer and audience. Whether the effect is positive or negative will be shown to depend on other factors associated with the social environment and social structure of the social context of a particular venue setting. It will also depend upon the condition of an audience as determined by the amount of alcohol consumed (Yates and Miller, 1982). Cook (1994) makes the point that, 'It's a fallacy to assume that a drunken audience laughs longer or louder - legless spectators range from surly to downright narcoleptic' (p.7). In working men's clubs in the North-East of England comedians adhere to an unwritten rule not to go on stage after 10.00pm because of the deteriorative condition of a drinking audience, 'They're all pissed and shouting and they couldn't give a toss who's up there' (See Appendix 2, note 2).

Social environment

The social environment of the social context of a venue setting is made up of a number of factors that work to establish sets of expectations and behaviours in both audience members and performers. One such factor is the pre-production of a performance. This includes the billing of performers, the sale and price of tickets, and any existing knowledge of the status and reputation of a performer and/or a particular venue setting. Some venue settings, such as Malcolm Hardee's 'Up the Creek' comedy club (circa. 1993) in Greenwich, South East London, established a reputation based on extremely (inter)active rowdy audiences, and for booking performances that deemed themselves able to succeed with such audiences. This is in stark contrast to other venue settings within the comedy club category, such as Jongleurs clubs for example, as well as with venue settings in other categories such as pier and theatre for example - in other words, venue settings that have established reputations for passive audiences that understand how and when to actively engage with a performance.

> [Theatre] Audiences do not participate in the spectacle except in certain limited and predefined ways, clapping and cheering, for example.
> (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.51)

The social environment of the social context of a venue setting therefore influences the way in which individuals are positioned collectively as a more or less disciplined audience to a performance. In a theatre, for example, there are conventional, ceremonial and ritual aspects to the social environment that work to establish a social distance between audience and performer. There is a greater social distance in this setting than most others for live performance humour, which Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) claim is reflected in the 'social status' and 'aura' of the performers working in it. They argue that this helps to position the audience to accept the conditions of what Bennett (1997) describes as a 'social contract'

> With this social contract put into place, usually by the exchange of money for a ticket which promises a seat in which to watch an action unfold, the spectator accepts a passive role and awaits the action which is to be interpreted.
> (Bennett, 1997, p.204 cited in Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.51)

Social distance, as a factor of the social environment of a venue setting, has a significant bearing on the social relationships that exist within the part of the social context of a venue setting that Hartley (1993) defines as the social structure of the social context.

Social relationships

An important constituent factor to the social context of a venue setting for live performance humour is the influence of social relationships that exist between an audience and performer and between audience members. The relationship between audience and performer varies according to the physical and social distance between the two, and this is largely determined by the particular combination of specific physical and social factors that make up the social context of a venue setting. McGrath (1981) considers social distance between

audience and performer specifically, and argues there is an optimum social distance for 'comedy' performers in different venue settings. While he claims there are potentially damaging effects to a performance that may arise from the closeness of the performer/audience relationship, he clearly states that there are advantages to such closeness for some performers in some venue settings, where, for example, they are particularly well known or established, and the audience feel as if they know something about him/her (p.60). McGrath supports this view on comedy performances by using locality as an example of how an audience with a sense of cultural identity with the performer will enhance a positive attitude towards the comedian. He refers to the continued and 'huge success of Billy Connolly in [his native] Glasgow', to demonstrate this point (p.58). Fine (1983) also acknowledges that an audience's knowledge and expectations of a performer will effect the relationship between them. He argues that this type of relationship varies from that between audience and the unknown performer where expectations are not so clearly defined, to a situation where, 'There are circumstances in which people expect to laugh ..... This is particularly true at some comedy performances at which the audience has a prior positive attitude to the comedian' (pp.166-7).

A further claim McGrath makes with regard to the social relationship between audience and comedy performers, is that 'working class settings' in which a performance takes place, such as working men's clubs, contribute to the positive attitude of an audience toward a performer. He argues this is because audience members are 'materially' situated in a particular geographical area which promotes a '*localism*', which he describes as a 'local feel' that produces a '*sense of identity* with the performer' (his italics).

> Even if coming from outside the locality, there is a sense not of knowing his or her soul, but a sense that he or she cares enough about being in that place with that audience and actually knows something about them. .... Working-men's clubs in the north of England depend upon this sense of locality, of identity, of cultural identity with the audience.
>
> (McGrath, 1981, p.58)

The research undertaken for this thesis and for my Master's thesis does not support McGrath's point about the localism of working men's clubs 'in the north' consistently producing any significantly positive attitude in the audience towards the performers who perform in them. Indeed, chapter six will show localism to be wholly unable to produce a sufficiently positive attitude from an audience that will always counteract (institutional) social contextual factors that can effectively undermine the performance of a 'local' comedian in a working men's club in 'the north'. However, the point being made is that social relationships between audiences and performers are formed on the basis of individual physical and social factors associated with a particular venue setting, that combine to establish the social structure of the venue setting. Therefore, in order to provide a complete account of a particular relationship between an audience and a performer, each of the individual factors must be considered as they exist within a particular venue setting at a particular time. This is because the relationship varies from one venue setting to another, and is not the same within a single setting from one performance to another.

The social relationships between audience members within a particular venue setting must also be considered as a vital part of the social context for live performance humour. These relationships also vary from one venue setting to another and from one performance to another. Therefore, in order to account for social relationships between members of an audience, the particular combination of individual physical and social factors shaping the relationships in a particular venue setting at a particular time must be identified. For example, the physical factors of a large and grandiose theatre setting with fixed rows of seats, determines that audiences members are seated in close proximity to strangers. This contributes significantly to audience member's definition of the situation as conventionally formal, which in turn contributes to the disciplining of their behaviour as members of an audience (Chaney, 1993).

> The reactions of other audience members reinforce that convention, as will be made clear to those who unwrap toffees or chat during a concert
>
> (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.54)

In comparison to a theatre audience, members of less disciplined audiences in venue settings such as some, fringe, working men's clubs, college bars, public houses and comedy clubs, for example, are part of a smaller audience, formed in a smaller setting, with other activities to that of watching a performance, such as drinking and socialising with friends in the venue setting being central to the evening's entertainment. Social relationships between members of an audience in these settings are, therefore, more usually less formal owing to different individual social and physical factors that combine to produce social contexts that are less disciplining of audience members.

Social norms

Hartley (1993) argues that in a social context, social norms refer to the expectations individuals have about how they and others should behave in that context. The social norms of different venue settings vary immensely, and can range from the conventionalised norms of passive attentive viewing in a theatre setting, to what Gritten (1996) has described as the 'almost barbaric' heckling of some performers in fringe venues at the Edinburgh festival. Substantial variations in the social norms of different venue settings can also be found in different venue settings within a category. Venues in the comedy club category, for example, can vary greatly. At one extreme there are notoriously raucous and undisciplined audiences, such as those characteristic of Malcolm Hardee's London based 'Up the Creek' and 'Tunnel' comedy clubs. At the opposite extreme, there are comedy clubs such as the Hyena comedy club, in Newcastle upon Tyne in the North-East of England and the Jongleurs nation-wide chain of comedy clubs, which have social structures characterised by social norms of passive attentive viewing of performance.

Therefore, while it is accepted that each venue setting within a category shares enough similarities in their physical and social environments to secure their location within the category, and can distinguish them from other venue setting categories, it is also accepted that different social contexts for live performance

humour exist within the same category. Although the Hyena comedy club has the same physical factors of a drinking audience seated around tables and the close proximity of a bar to the performance space, it can not be regarded as a working men's club because it does not have a sufficient similarity of individual factors to establish a social structure that is comparable to that of a working men's club.

The social norms of the Hyena comedy club are in marked contrast to those that are characteristic of a working men's club. While audiences sit at tables and drink alcohol with friends in both settings, the ensuing murmur of conversation that is normal in a working men's club is not tolerated at all within the established social norms of the Hyena. I have attended this comedy club and watched as performers have appealed to talking members of the audience to stop spoiling the entertainment for everyone else in the club. On one occasion three performers in turn, and a compere working in between their acts, made it clear they were annoyed and upset at a small group of three friends who were showing less than full attention to their work on stage, and called upon the rest of the audience to be equally perturbed by the group's lack of attention. This was by no means a disruptive group shouting and heckling the performers, or even talking loudly or obstreperously during the performances, yet so serious was the breach in the social norms of the club that the group was approached by the manager of the club and asked to leave. I was a member of the group and I asked politely why we were being asked to leave. The manager made it clear that during the performances the venue was not a place for any audience activity other than quiet attention to the performers and laughter at their material. A reasoned case was put to the manager that a little quiet chat between friends in a comedy club could hardly constitute a serious threat to any competent performer - why would an audience be more interested in some friends quietly exchanging a few remarks than a good performer on stage? Without answering the manager left the group and returned some 10 minutes later with bouncer called Dave, and this time told us that we would have to leave the venue or else we would be removed. At the same time the compere of the show came on stage to inform the audience

of the manager's chosen course of action, and then incited the audience to cheer their approval of the decision. The compere made it clear that if members of the audience had not enjoyed the performances that evening, then this had been entirely due to our actions as a disruptive group that had spoiled it all for them, and that it had nothing to do with the quality of the performances they had watched. Here the influence of social norms to the social context of a venue setting is clear from the reactions of performers, audience and management, to ourselves as the deviant group who experienced varying forms of negative sanctions that were invoked by the social norms of the venue setting being broken. These sanctions included insults from the stage, isolation and exclusion from the audience as a social group, and finally being thrown out of the club.

While the Hyena comedy club has physical factors that are characteristic of working men's clubs, it does not have the social norms of working men's clubs. What was defined as such intolerably deviant behaviour that a group of friends in an audience were forced to leave the venue, is entirely normal behaviour for audience members in the concert room of a working men's club. The social norms of the Hyena comedy club illustrate the way in which a passive audience with a high level of attention to a performance can be established without the contribution of some physical factors, such as fixed rows of seats facing the stage. However, as the social context of a venue setting reflects a complete combination of physical and social factors, some factors associated with instilling the passivity and high attention that is characteristic of theatre audiences can be identified in the Hyena comedy club. For example, the high price of tickets, the centrality of live performance humour to the evening's entertainment, the reputation of the performer and/or the venue setting to the pleasurable expectations of the audience, and the social role expectations that audience members perceive in the context of the venue setting, that they should not, for example, engage in any activity (such as talking to friends) that is extraneous to the focused attention to a performance. Chapter six will show that these factors are not present in working men's clubs. The Hyena is representative of what Fitzgerald identifies as a recent trend in comedy clubs.

He argues that more recently some comedy clubs, such as the Jongleurs franchise, have moved towards imposing more discipline on the audience by various means, such as banning heckling and employing staff to enforce it, increasing the price of tickets and including food and table service (which restricts the movement of audience members) as a part of the entertainment package. Fitzgerald argues that the main reason for this change to theatre type refinement of some comedy clubs is the commercialisation of the comedy circuit, where, for example, Jongleurs as a nation-wide network of comedy clubs, have engaged a disciplining process to ensure a social context for a palatable entertainment package for audiences (Cook, 1994). Consequently, the social structure of these clubs makes a significant contribution to a very different social context for live performance humour to that of other comedy clubs in the same venue setting category.

The different social structures of different venue settings influence different social roles for performers and audience members, which indicate different social contexts for live performance humour that refer to a particular venue setting and not to a category. Fine (1983) argues that in any performance of live performance humour, the audience will undoubtedly expect that the role of comedian involves certain role requirements, such as being capable of making them laugh (at least at reasonable intervals), having the confidence to perform their routine in front of large numbers of people, and being on stage for a certain length of time (p.164). Similarly a comedian is likely to hold certain role expectations of his/her audience. S/he may expect the audience to be passive, attentive, not to interrupt, or to be active, inattentive, or to shout out and heckle. The specificity of these roles is largely determined by the prevailing social context of the particular venue setting, and the level of performance success is effected by the complementarity of role expectations, not only between performer and audience, but also between audience members. An audience in a working men's club, for example, (as will be shown in chapter six), expects to have their attention grabbed by a comedian right from the start of the performance, and then be made to laugh at very frequent intervals. A

performance that is not able to fulfil these audience expectations carries a high propensity to fail in the setting. Yet audiences in other venue settings do not have such severe role expectations of performers and are more amenable to be appreciative of performances, such as sketch or improvisation that are not expected to pepper an audience with emphatically punchlined routines.

Social role expectations are, therefore, an important factor in the composition of a social context for live performance humour, as they are influential to the positioning of a performance within a venue setting. A 'type' of performance with joking material that does not fit with an audience's expectations of what a humorous performance should be, will have less chance of being successful with the audience. For example, the role expectations of a performer in a college venue setting not to crack conservative category-routinised jokes about mother-in-laws, Pakis, puffs and birds with big tits, will significantly effect audience reaction to a performer who does authentically fulfil such a 'mainstream' type performance role. Such a performance will also influence the social roles of audience members towards other audience members, as individual members must be circumspect in their laughter, as finding the performance funny may run contrary to the social role expectations of a student audience.

> the nature of the social situation plays an extremely important part in determining the individual's appreciation of and responsiveness to various types of humor.
>
> (Young and Fyre, 1966, p.754)

The 'correct' or 'incorrect' social roles for audience members and performers, therefore reflect the particular social context of a particular venue setting to determine the '(in)correctness' of behaviour in terms of the social context for live performance humour. Knowing how to be 'correct' as a performer or audience member is acknowledged as representing the social rules that characterise the social structure of a social context.

Social rules

The social structure of a particular venue setting involves rules that are to be adhered to, both by audience and performer. Atkinson (1984) argues that it is the nature of audiences attending live performances to be rule bound, and that this helps to ensure that the audience behaves as one body,

> When we are seen to step out of line, we draw attention to our ignorance of how to behave properly on such occasions, and may find our social competence called into question.
> (Atkinson, 1984, p.18, cited in Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.52)

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that performances that take place in a public space, such as theatre, 'are more conventionalized and rule-bound than are private ones' (p.42). Although live performance humour takes place in a 'public' space, there are, however, significant variations in the social rules of different venue settings that must be taken into account. For example, a theatre or pier setting may be viewed as being more formal in comparison to the apparently informal and relaxed atmosphere of the concert room of a working men's club, where friends sit around tables and drink and converse, even during a performance. However, working men's clubs may be experienced by some audience members as an imposingly formal and disciplinary situation if social rules are not followed. Indeed, the social rules that apply to audiences in working men's clubs that give rise to an impression of informality, are the same social rules that may cause an audience member to experience the club as a formal and constraining venue setting, even to the point of it being encountered as a perceptibly hostile situation. This can happen when members chat during a bingo session, or simply because an individual is an unfamiliar face in a particular club and is, therefore, not established in the social context of the setting. Chapter six will show that the 'correctness' of audience and performer behaviour in a working men's club is based on highly formalised institutional rules and procedures that define the social norms of the social context of the venue setting.

Conclusion

Social context is used in this chapter to refer precisely to a combination of individual physical and social factors that are directly associated with particular venue settings. It is also used to refer to the essential contribution these factors make in the construction of an unequivocally appropriate social situation for humour. Hence, the preferred definition of social context is more specific than the more common sociological usage put forward by Fine (1983), Mulkay (1988) and Palmer (1994), which emphasises the dependency of humour on the (in)appropriateness of everyday social situations. This is because a venue setting is recognised as a designated place for the presentation of live performance of humour to an audience, and is, therefore, an appropriate social context for the kind of humour that Palmer (1994) identifies as 'comedy humour' rather than 'everyday humour'. Comedy humour does not rely on 'stimuli that only work if we are in the mood for them', rather it 'is carefully articulated onto the structure of the narrative, which is responsible for the meaning the humorous moments have' (p.177).

Comedy humour is itself a constituent part of what Palmer calls an 'occasion for humour'. By this he means there is an appreciable combination of factors that effectively position an individual to be geared to be in receipt of what is recognised as permissible humour (p.5). To be predisposed to buy tickets and to travel to a particular venue setting with the expectation of being humorously entertained by a staged performance, clearly locates such a setting as an integral part of what is obviously recognised as an occasion for humour, and it is the notion of an occasion for humour that is a key element in the way the term social context is used here. This is because the definition of an occasion for humour is substantively based upon the influence of a venue setting to determine the roles and relationships of an audience and a performance. Having established that an audience plays a key role in most attempts to define performance and that a venue setting plays a key role in forming the audience to a performance (which will be confirmed in the following chapters), the venue setting in which a

performance is given to an assembled audience is put forward as the definition of social context as it is being used here.

The influence of the social context of a venue setting is evident in the failure of live performance humour, given that the presentation of permissible comedy humour by a competent performer within the cueing context of a socially located occasion would seem to guarantee success. It has been shown in this chapter, however, that it is the particular combination of physical and social factors associated with the social structure and environment of a particular venue setting that work to determine what is permissible comedy humour, and, therefore, what can be successful with an audience as live performance humour in the social context. Conversely, the constituent factors of a venue setting work to determine what is impermissible as live performance humour to an audience in the social context. To demonstrate this, references have been made throughout the chapter to a variety of venue settings within the eight named categories, in order to provide specific examples of how individual physical and social factors of different venue settings can be identified in terms of their effective contribution to a particular social context - a context that is able to establish expectations of social roles and relationships within an audience and between audience and performers, upon which the production of (un)successful live performance humour is based.

The main problem is the practical inability to provide the definitive detail of the social context of each venue setting in each category identified in the thesis. There are three key reasons for this. First, there can be substantial variations in venue settings located within a category, such as comedy clubs, public houses and fringe venues for example. Secondly, the social context of a single venue setting can change over time as a result of alterations to physical and social factors being made - to realise revised commercial aspirations for example. Thirdly, some venue settings can be temporarily altered for some performances by having physical factors changed, such as the introduction of fixed row seating and a prominent and well lit stage in a pub or fringe venue, for example. Yet,

while it has not been possible to give categorical definitions of the social context of all venue settings that are located to a familiarly named category, the chapter does put forward the venue setting in which live performance humour takes place as a social context that works effectively as a determining influence on the success or failure of live performance humour as social practice.

> The common consensus among stand-up comedians is that there are three things which can go wrong with a comedy gig: the act, the audience, or the room itself... Most awful gigs are staged in rooms where comedy should never have been on the menu in the first place, and the comic is nothing so much as an unwelcome distraction from whatever entertainment the punters had in store
>
> (Cook, 1994, p.166)

Chapter Five

Live performance humour involves one essential and defining characteristic; the actual physical presence of an audience. Indeed, this characteristic is put forward as an absolutely necessary condition for the application and use of the term 'performance' in the context of the thesis. It follows that if the physical proximity of an audience is to be identified as a definitive feature of the form of live performance humour, then the significance of an audience must be considered in its relationship to a performance. Consequently, the aim of the chapter is to provide a comprehensive account of what constitutes an audience and what influence it has on the production of (un)successful live performance humour. In order to achieve this aim a number of specific objectives will be addressed. The first is to provide a definition of what an audience is and the second is to identify the specific features of an audience for live performance humour. To achieve the second objective a comparison will be made between 'live' audiences and television audiences. This is to allow specific features of each to be identified and differentiated. A third objective is to make account of how audiences for live performance humour vary from one venue setting to another. Two further objectives are to establish the interactive role of an audience with live performance humour and to demonstrate how the relationship between audience and performance is a vital determinant to the success of a performance.

Audience

Shevtsova (1989) argues that in the general area of audience studies the growth in live audience studies has been slow, largely because, 'the discipline we know as theatre studies has considered sociology to be alien to it, a perception that goes hand-in-glove with the idea that theatre art and sociology are so different from each other as to warrant mutual exclusion' (p.23). Cruz & Lewis (1994) make the point that this is changing and that over the last 20 years research into

audiences has received contributions from a wide range of theoretical perspectives; and from 'cross disciplinary convergence's among social sciences and the humanities' (p.1). However, while research into audiences has expanded during the past two decades with a growth in areas such as media studies, communication studies and ethnographic research, the main focus of the research, particularly throughout the past decade, has been primarily on television audiences (Ang, 1991; Moores, 1993). Yet, despite what Moores refers to as the 'ethnographic turn' and that, 'new ways of investigating and interpreting audiences have emerged - attempts to chart the sense that media consumers make of the texts and technologies they encounter in everyday life'(p.1), the majority of such works often begin by describing the inherent difficulties involved in researching such an audience comprised of a privately situated and geographically dispersed unknown number of people. Although it is readily conceded that it is difficult to gain access to the private space in which media audiences are located (generally the household) and the reverse is true for any kind of live performance, where the researcher is in a prime position to conduct observational studies whilst actively participating as a member of an audience, media audience research has continued to dominate the sociological domain of audience studies and the kind of live audience research that is more relevant to this thesis remains very much a minority interest, even to the point that the major studies that have been undertaken have concentrated on theatre audiences (Mangham and Overington, 1987; Shevtsova, 1989; Bennet, 1990; Chaney, 1993; Cameron and Gillespie, 1996; Carlson, 1996; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998).

As a result of television and other media audiences forming the primary emphasis of audience research, the field of substantive reference material available is limited in its application to this study, given that the essential requirement here is to consider the inter-relationship between audience and performer as a integral part in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. It is the 'face to face' nature of the relationship between audience and performer in a particular social situation that forms the basis of a social discourse

that will ultimately determine the success of live performance humour, therefore, it is a completely different kind of relationship to even the most interactive conceptualisations of any of the other media audiences.

> The literary, as well as the filmic, text is a fixed and finished product which cannot be directly affected by its audiences. Even the serial form or the revised novel only allows limited input from readers. In the theatre every reader is involved in the making of a play. Indeed, the audience of even the most 'culinary' theatre is involved in a reciprocal relationship which can change the quality and success of a performance. No two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement. In much contemporary theatre the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance and enjoys a productive role which exceeds anything demanded of the reader or cinema audience.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.22)

This means there is an obvious and immediate requirement to formulate a clear definition of an audience for live performance humour. Such a definition must offer a comprehensive account of the constituent features that identify it as being substantially different from other audiences. The starting point for the formulation of this definition is to name the audience for live performance humour with a title that will clearly differentiate it from a privatised audience for broadcast television and radio. Taking into account the absolute necessity of the relationship between audience and performer as an essential condition for the definition of the form of live performance humour itself, it is deemed appropriate for the audience to be referred to as 'live', as this will serve to reflect the interactive dynamics involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. While the dynamics will be examined in detail later in the chapter, it is sufficient for the moment to state that the term 'live' (audience) refers to the actual determinative effect of the attendant audience on a performance. Tomlinson argues that the presence of a highly interactive audience for live performance humour will inevitably cause a performer to make adaptive decisions to promote the success of the performance, 'the comedian is continually adjusting depending on the response' (cited in Fine, 1983, p.164). Each decision as to what 'adjustments' to make is invariably based on (re)actions from the audience, such as laughter, silence, inattention, heckling, movement etc. and for a performer to succeed s/he must be able to respond directly and

correctly to effectively accommodate such actions as part of the performance. Therefore, on the basis of the same set of situationally based interactive criteria that apply to the term 'live' performance, the term 'live' is deemed to be equally applicable to participating responsive and interactive audiences in attendance at such performances.

The live audience

As the title of 'live' audience is put forward to identify an audience that is characteristically different from a television audience, it becomes necessary to establish a substantive definition of what a live audience is. Ang (1991) puts forward a description she regards as being the most obvious definition,

> a collection of spectators, a group of individuals who are gathered together to attend a performance and 'receive' a message 'sent' by another.
>
> (Ang, 1991, p.33)

She goes on to say that if this definition of an audience is to be accepted then it is to be conceded that, 'an audience would then be synonymous with the total sum of people that are part of it' (p.33). The point of synonymy is developed further by Harre (1981) who refers to audiences as a 'taxonomic collective', by which he means,

> an entity of serialized, in principle unrelated individuals who form a group solely because each member has a characteristic - in our case, spectatorship - that is like that of each other member.
>
> (Harre, cited in Ang, 1991, p.33)

Ang believes that these descriptions which define audiences as a gathering of different individuals at a specific venue in order to observe a particular live event/performance can be applied to audiences in a wide range of social contexts, such as football matches, theatrical performances and comedy shows. She does not put forward any grounds to recommend that audiences at these different event/performances should be considered as having different characteristic features that distinguish them from each other. She appears to

accept that the value of the description of these audiences rests on the commonality of two primary features: the first being the gathering of individuals in one specifically determined space and the second being the purpose of the gathering to spectate. The practicality of the two features are accepted by Ang as being sufficient to distinguish between the two definitions of the two different types of audience she recognises; namely, between what she regards as a live audience and the other being a 'television audience' which she acknowledges is a more 'elusive phenomenon', that is 'typically characterized by geographical dispersedness', yet which is conceptualised empirically as a 'taxonomic collective' (p.34).

> Conceiving television audience as a taxonomic collective of amenable audience members, then, leads to ascribing stability to the category of 'television audience' by purging from it the unpredictable, the capricious, and the erratic that characterizes the social world of actual audiences (Ellis's 'viewers').
>
> (Ang, 1991, p.37)

Ang confirms the distinction between television audiences as a discursive construct and the social world of actual audiences, when she reiterates the primary features that define live audiences by putting forward 'the fact' that television audiences do not have to be in one specific venue at the same time in order to observe an event/performance. The immediate criticism of this definition of a live audience is that it is overly reliant on the universal application of two generalised features and, as a result, specific detail that refers particularly to the way in which a live audience of spectators interacts with an event/performance and can distinguish between different live audiences is overlooked. First, she does not take account of significant factors involved in the construction of both the social (audience member) and private (individual) roles of spectators. Bennett, (1990) argues that the way these roles are constructed works to produce a spectatorial gathering at a particular event/performance that directly effects the interaction of the spectator with the performance.

> As planning (or the lack of it) plays a part in shaping receptive mood, so the ease or difficulty of attendance has its effect. How did the spectator travel to the theatre? Did he or she already have tickets? The amount of leisure time generally available will affect the time committed to this particular activity? Or is the performance available in the workplace or at a union hall? Is the performance part of an extended leisure activity (a vacation, a night out etc.), a celebration, a gathering of a local community, part of a university programme? Did travelling to the theatre involve a difficult journey or adverse weather conditions? All such elements of the gathering process are bound to influence the spectator's preparation for the theatrical event.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.133)

As a consequence of her failure to account for the different roles of spectatorship and the factors involved in their construction, Ang does not give any indication of the basic characteristic of a live audience, which is its essentially interactive relationship with the performance. Elam (1980) argues that the primary condition of an audience is 'the ability to recognise the performance *as such*', which effectively signals, or permits the performance itself (p.87). Ang does not offer this as a characteristic feature of a live audience, because it is not possible for her to identify this feature when there is no distinction made between an event and a performance - they are simply lumped together as the rationale for a definition based on a group of people attending a particular place at a particular time to spectate. But, an event and a performance are not the same thing and they should not be put forward as such. Bennett (1990) argues, spectators attending a theatre are participants in theatre as a cultural event which involves many diverse aspects and activities such as anticipation, travelling, meeting friends, foyer activities, cultural status, high price of tickets, architectural grandeur etc. (pp.137-39) and the stage performance forms only a part of the event, '[theatre] is an event which relies on the physical presence of an audience to confirm its cultural status' (p.92). Hence, event and performance should be clearly differentiated in order to show that it is performance that is the specific concern with regard to studying the interactive character of the live audiences they attract. Indeed, the more common usage of the term 'event' signifies an insignificantly low level of interaction between spectators and spectacle; as defined by the ability of the spectators (as a live audience) to effectively determine the success or failure of the spectacle (as a live performance). For

example, a live event could be a formula one motor race and although there may be an 'audience' of over 100,000 people in attendance, they will not be able to normatively interact with the speeding cars in any way that could determine the success or failure of the performance of the car or the driver. In stark comparison to this, an audience in attendance at a venue setting for live performance humour will normatively interact with a performance to effectively determine the success or failure of the performance.

The above descriptions of a 'live' audience are based primarily on the single characteristic of attendance at a 'live' event/performance; and even when there is a separation of event and performance in order for performances to be considered there is a simplicity to the incidental definition of a live audience as a homogeneous collective at a live performance, which gives rise to a number of issues that must be incorporated into a more substantive definition of a 'live' audience - specifically for live performance humour. The first of these issues is to appreciate the individual as well as the collective aspects of a live audience,

> While the collective response is nevertheless generally homogeneous, the individual's response to performance undoubtedly constitutes the core of the spectator's pleasure.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.165)

Cruz and Lewis (1994) argue there are 'social desires' prevalent within the individuals that constitute an audience and these must be taken into account in a worthwhile definition of a live audience. The 'social desires' of a live audience refers to the specific and potentially wide variety of reason(s) individuals choose to become a member of a particular audience. For example, some individuals may be in an audience mainly to have a night out in the company of their friends and may not be remotely interested in the performance. Some will be gathered in an audience because they have heard good reviews of the individual performer and are therefore positively positioned to receive the particular performance. Others will be in attendance out of idle curiosity or from a general interest in the area of performance. Some may find themselves as part of an audience without having any design or intention to be in such an audience, as they may simply

have found themselves visiting a pub and inadvertently becoming part of an audience to a performance. The important point being made is that it is not acceptable to claim support for a definition of a 'live' audience for performance humour on the basis of an unerring acceptance of an audience as a homogenised group of individuals who are gathered for exactly the same reason, to spectate a live performance. Even the assumption that individuals in attendance at live performance humour are there to be made to laugh or to be entertained, does not sufficiently account for the disparity of individual members that form an audience. For example, it is plausible that some members may be in attendance for highly personalised and completely incongruous reasons to those normally associated with being a member of an audience for live performance humour. Quite simply, some people may be watching the performance for serious reasons associated with formal work values rather than for pleasure from entertainment leisure time, such as a critic looking for copy, an agent looking for new talent, a performer looking for new material, a member of the performer's road crew, staff working in the venue setting, or a research student writing a Ph.D. Some may be at a performance because they are the performer's partner or close friend and travel with them routinely as a companion. Consequently, a comprehensive definition of a 'live' audience must recognise that a performance can appeal to an individual member of an audience for a single reason, or for many different reasons simultaneously. It is, therefore, a critical weakness in a definition of a 'live' audience to accept the predicate that there is an absolute synonymy to an audience which is formed as a collective adjunct to a live performance.

The second issue to be considered within a substantive definition of 'live' audience, is the effect of the social context in which the performance takes place. Given that the interactive responses of a live audience to a performance have a definite bearing on the success of the performance, the significance of a venue setting, as a social situation in which behaviour is governed by rules and norms that vary according to the social context, must be included as a central feature in a viable definition of a 'live' audience. As was shown in chapter four, the effect of venue setting on the relationship between audience and performer has far

reaching consequences regarding the (un)successfulness of live performance humour. Even common audience responses such as applause and laughter, which are perceived as a positive boon to the success of humorous performance, are socially structured by what Hartley (1993) refers to as the physical and social environments of the particular setting. This is to clarify that what is considered to be a 'live' audience cannot even be reasonably classified as an 'audience' without consideration of the influence of social context upon the behaviour of a number of disparate individuals who gather together in one place to watch a performance (Bennett, 1990; Chaney, 1993; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998).

The third point to be included in a comprehensive definition of 'live' audience, as it relates directly to the subject of live performance humour, is the interaction between audience and performance. Fine (1983) argues that work on theatre audiences provides a useful starting point for an analysis of the detail of audiences for live performance humour. This is because he claims the characteristics of audience, as discussed by theatre and performance studies, are found to exist in varying degrees in the audiences for live comic performances, although they are heavily dependent upon the venue setting in which a performance takes place. The influence of the venue setting upon the social relationships between audience and performer is an important point that will be discussed throughout the chapter. Hence the theatre venue setting category will be considered, in order to establish the significant influence of contextual factors on the behaviour of live audiences to live performance humour. The theatre setting is typified in common references to West-End theatre and is a setting that is familiar to many people from having experienced the venue as a member of an audience at some time, either as a child at a Christmas pantomime, a teenager on a school visit to see a play being studied for 'A' level examinations, or as an adult.

The live theatre audience

With regard to the setting of the theatre, Cameron and Gillespie (1996) provide a discussion of what they refer to as the 'social audience' of theatre (p.27), as that which 'gathers its audience into a defined space at a certain time and allows the reactions of the audience to affect the performance' (p.14). The recognition of the characteristic potential of an audience to affect a performance is consequently built into the definition of a 'live' audience that the authors put forward. They argue that in order to construct what they consider to be a more complete definition of a live audience; it must be based around three important traits they have identified. The first is that a 'live' audience should be considered as a group of people rather than individuals. Secondly, the grouping is reinforced by the fact that they come together at a special place and pre-arranged time to watch a performance. Thirdly, as a group they are in a situation to affect the way performers behave and therefore have the power to affect the overall performance. However, it will be shown later in the chapter that these three traits reflect the particular characteristics of a setting that is markedly more formal in comparison to other venue settings for live performance humour. This formality is derived from a number of institutional as well as social and ideological factors that were detailed in chapter four, such as the social location of the venue within 'high art' conceptions of bourgeois culture, the high price of tickets, the physical organisation of the auditorium in terms of the arrangement of seating, the 'fourth wall' proscenium arch stage and the darkening of the auditorium to precipitate attentive viewing of the lighted stage. There is also the social environment of the theatre as a cultural event which enforces pronounced rules of acceptable social behaviour both outside and within the performance space which is to be considered as a significant formalising factor.

> The traditional evening performance is in many ways a central aspect of the mainstream theatrical event. This emphasizes the work/leisure split and thus promotes a sense of passivity in audiences. It also allows and encourages the arrangement of pre- and post-theatre eating. This enhances the sense of occasion, the pleasurable experience of an evenings entertainment.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.128)

The individual physical, social and cultural factors make the theatre setting very well equipped to impose a level of discipline on a 'live' theatre audience, which make it considerably different from other 'live' audiences in other venue settings. One other important factor involved in the characteristic disciplining of theatre audiences is that of the privacy afforded to individual members of a theatre audience. Elam, (1980) notes that while the spectator surrenders their individual status upon entering the auditorium, each 'has his own well-marked private space, individual seat, and relative immunity from physical contact with his fellows (and even from seeing them)' (pp.64-5). This is regarded as an inevitable outcome of the naturalistic theatre developed within a bourgeois culture that places such a high value on the individual and his/her privacy. Hence it is with the setting of the theatre in mind that Cameron and Gillespie (1996) outline the three traits they believe characterise a live 'social' theatre audience and it is from this that they go on to describe a further 'three other traits', which they regard as essential to an understanding of the nature of performance within the contextual entirety of its audience and the setting (p.27).

The first of the three factors considers the audience as a social entity and does so in a number of ways. First, a performance should provide an audience with a sense of itself as a social unit, with the result of an audience entering into a relationship not only with a performer, but also with one another. The way in which individual members of an audience will experience a performance depends upon both the performance itself and the responses elicited by other audience members. Elam (1980) argues that communication between spectators usually determines a 'homogeneity of response' despite variations in the expectations and/or cultural values brought to the theatre by the individual spectator (p.96).

> In almost all cases laughter, derision, and applause is infectious. The audience, through homogeneity of reaction, receives confirmation of their decoding on an individual and private basis and is encouraged to suppress counter-readings in favour of the reception generally shared.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, pp.163-4)

Audience members who breach the collective norms of the social context and shout out obviously unwanted heckles at performers, or who cause a viewing distraction by their behaviour with other members of the audience, can spoil the experience of a performance for other individuals in the audience. By belonging to an audience as a social entity, as with any other type of social group, certain types of behaviour are expected and other kinds are viewed as inappropriate. Therefore, to discuss audience behaviour *per se* can be seen as being too vague, as what is considered to be acceptable audience behaviour will vary from venue setting to another, not only between venue setting categories, but between venue settings within a category. Cameron and Gillespie (1996) claim that 'when a sense of suitable group behaviour breaks down' and the implicit guidelines of appropriate behaviour are no longer considered as part of the wider audience, individual members of an audience 'may behave as individuals rather than as an audience' (p.28). An example of audience members being classed as single individuals need not necessarily involve directed behaviour that is aimed at being deliberately disruptive to the situation of a performance, as what is seen to be accepted as appropriate behaviour during a performance in the setting of a working men's club, for example, such as talking during a performance or leaving one's seat at will to move around the performance space, would, in a theatre setting, be considered as inappropriate and anti-social behaviour. Such active audience behaviour is less likely to happen in the theatre setting because of individual physical and social factors associated with the setting (as detailed in chapter four). However, other venue settings are undergoing changes that are specifically designed to reduce the disruptive potential of some members of an audience - both towards performers and other members of the audience. As was mentioned in chapter four, there is a growing trend in some 'circuit' venue settings, such as the Jongleurs franchise, to have an audience effectively policed by members of staff who are instructed to prevent behaviour that is considered to be inappropriate, from developing to a level that some members of an audience might find disruptive or spoiling to their evening's entertainment. Although the means of audience discipline may be different between theatre and comedy club venue settings, the goal is the same in that an audience for live performance

humour is contained within a social situation which greatly reduces the potential for individual members to persist with a type of behaviour that can effectively undermine the preferred relationships between audience and performer and between different audience members, that are regarded as being conducive to successful live performance humour. For example, the Jongleurs comedy clubs have banned heckling and members of an audience who do heckle will be removed from the venue. As was mentioned in chapter four, I was asked to leave the Hyena comedy club, in Newcastle upon Tyne, in December 1997, because I was deemed to be talking too much while the performers were on stage.

Groupness

An audience is also acknowledged as a social entity from the number of people participating in it contributing to a sense of groupness. Following Harre's ethogenic research, groupness refers to the premise that a group is more than the number of individuals that comprise it, it is instead 'a supra-individual, having a distinctive range of properties' (Coppieters, 1981, p.36). Smith (1996) argues that there is a distinctive range of properties involved in what members of an audience, as a group, find funny.

> what someone finds laughable is a means of confirming group affiliations and establishing social boundaries. It marks of "people like us" from "them". Not to laugh in certain situations is to risk censure either as identifying oneself as a person who does not share the values informing the joke or as one who is lacking the knowledge to appreciate the joke.
>
> (Smith, 1996, p.272)

Cameron and Gillespie (1996) use the example of an individual's laughter to illustrate groupness in a live audience, in that it is 'buoyed up, expanded, made more joyous by other laughter' (p.28). Laughing because other members of an audience are laughing is what Giles and Oxford (1970) call 'social laughter'(cited in Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington, 1974). This provides the individual with a sense of belonging to a wider social group which Davis (1993) argues works to increase enjoyment of a performance (p.149). Whether or not

the sound of other people laughing in response to humorous material causes an individual to exhibit more overt responses of amusement, has been the focus of a number of research studies by Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington (1974); Martin and Gray (1996); and Smyth and Fuller (1972).

In all three studies one group of mixed sex university undergraduates listened to humorous material without the accompaniment of 'canned laughter'. A second mixed sex group of university undergraduates listened to the same material but with 'canned laughter' added. All subjects were tested separately to avoid group influence. Recordings of their audible laughter and notes on their facial expressions were taken. All three studies produced the same results and each concluded that when the subjects listened to humorous material with added 'canned laughter', they laughed more and rated the material as funnier than the subjects who had listened to the same material without the 'canned laughter'. No differences in responses were found between men and women, both sexes found the same material funny.

Why the subjects found the material funnier and laughed more overtly when canned laughter was included is a matter of debate and a number of explanations have been put forward. One holds that 'social laughter' occurred and the subjects' overt responses increased because they could hear other people (canned laughter) laughing. Smyth and Fuller (1972) have some reservations about this conclusion, arguing that because the subjects had rated the material more amusing when accompanied by canned laughter, it was impossible to say whether they laughed more because they could hear other people laughing or just because they found the material to be funnier. A second explanation is that when people are laughing at humorous material they are implying that the material is funny and, as a result of social conformity, the subjects who may not really have found the material amusing felt under pressure to laugh in order to conform. A third explanation put forward by Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington is that,

> The laughter of others may simply act as a situational cue which conditions the listener to search for a humorous interpretation of the material, directing the perceiver to "see the funny side" of things.
>
> (Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington, 1974, p.534)

This theory is also suggested by Martin and Gray (1996), who go on to make the point that for laughter to be used as an attentional marker, the material must still be well performed and funny. Accepting that the material is well performed and that the laughing responses of some members of an audience act as a situational cue to produce 'social laughter' in other members, the underlying significance of the work on laughter relates to the definition of a 'live' audience. This is because 'social laughter' is a feature of live performance which is lacking in 'privatised' audiences to forms of broadcast media, which explains the frequent use of either canned laughter or studio audience laughter by many television shows. Writing specifically on television situation-comedy, Bowes (1992) states that a prime purpose of any humour is, 'to make us feel part of a cohesive social group, where we can 'share' a joke (p.137). Hence the use of artificial means such as canned laughter in broadcast media is to reproduce notions in the audience of groupness; thereby encouraging them to join in with the responses of others and thus increasing the overall level of (humorous) enjoyment. It is, therefore, a fundamental characteristic of a 'live' audience for live performance humour, that individuals have an acute awareness of their membership of a group, generated by the practical, immediate and authentic circumstances endemic to the occasion of the performance.

Cameron and Gillespie (1996) argue that there are three main factors which are important in encouraging the development of groupness in an audience and that they have a significant effect on performance (pp. 29-30). The first of the factors is the size of the audience.

Size

Morrison (1940, cited in Young and Fyre, 1966), found that there is a positive relationship between the size of an audience and the number of laughs per

performance. This claim is supported by Andrus (1946, cited in Martin and Gray, 1996), who argues that the larger the audience the more its members are inclined to laugh. Holland (1982) offers support for this research, stating that the smaller the audience the fewer the laughs. Although it is impossible to define the exact number of people required to achieve a sense of groupness, it is possible to identify when a certain group is either too small or becomes too large. However, the size factor must be considered in relation to the second factor, which is audience space, as determined by both the size and the type of venue setting.

It is acknowledged that the size of an audience is not determined solely by the number of people, but rather the space filling capacity of the number of people relative to a particular venue setting. For example, a performance given to an audience of 700 in a theatre setting is obviously a larger number of people than an audience of 200 people in a comedy club. But this does not realistically reflect the size of the audience to a performance in the two settings. If the theatre has a seating capacity of 2,000 then an audience of 700 people will appear relatively small with two-thirds of the seats empty. Conversely, a comedy club, public house or fringe audience will appear large if its 200 members fill it to capacity. A recognition of the importance of establishing a sense of groupness through the size of an audience in relation to a performance space, is evident in the typical design and development of comedy club venues. For example, it is common for these venues to be developed in small buildings or parts of buildings where the actual space available to the venue setting is restricted. The structural limitations obviously determine what can be developed as a performance space and this is further restricted by the necessary inclusion of commercially productive amenities such as bars. It is also common to find that such venue settings, that do, however, have plenty of auditorium space available for a performance, will deliberately make it smaller by positioning tables and seating close to the performance space. The compression of a relatively small number of people into a smaller space close to performances within a venue setting, creates

an impression of a larger size audience from the intimacy of members with each other and with the performer(s) (Aiello, Thompson and Brodzinsky, 1983).

The final factor Cameron and Gillespie (1996) identify in relation to groupness refers directly to the arrangement of a audience in terms of the physical geography of the setting. They make the point that, 'the arrangements of seats interact with size and space to affect the sense of groupness of the audience' (p.30). It is clear that this sense of groupness is seen to be highly desirable by performers. Indeed, on a number of occasions I have attended venue settings as a member of an audience, where a number of about 60 people have sat in small groups around tables that were spread across the full space of the performance area of the venue setting. The effect of this was to give an impression that there were not many people present. Such an impression is a negative one to both performers and members of an audience and the first thing the performers did in each of these situations was to call upon members of the audiences to rearrange their seating so that they came together in a concentrated group as close to the performance space as possible. The observations of performer's actions to move people in an audience to produce a more crowded or intimate atmosphere in the venue, give a clear indication that performers are aware of the real and practical benefits of the groupness of an audience attending their performances.

> The percentage of seats occupied will inevitably affect reception both through its effect on the quality of actors' performances and through inter-spectator relations. The experience of a spectator in a packed auditorium is different from that of one in a half-empty theatre. When a theatre has very few spectators, the sense of audience as group can be destroyed. This fragmentation of the collective can have the side effect of psychological discomfort for the individual which inhibits or revises response.
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.140)

Time

The second factor which is considered as essential to an understanding of the nature of a live audience, recognises the ephemeral quality of a live audience in relation to a performance. This is to say, that although an audience will come

together as a social grouping, it occurs for only a brief period of time, at a particular time at a particular place. However, unlike the previous factor of a live audience as a social entity, this aspect of audience remains consistent in all situations, regardless of the setting in which a live performance occurs. This feature of a live audience may appear to be more relevant to the theatre setting, given that theatre audiences are likely to be made up of people who do not know anyone else in the audience beyond their attendant companion(s). This follows from the theatre not being a part of the everyday routine of most members in the audience, which results in multitude of small groups of people, couples and single individuals who are strangers to each other, coming together for the specific purpose of a performance and who leave when the performance is over with scant possibility of ever grouping as the same audience again. However, even though audiences in working men's clubs are recognised as consisting of a hard-core of club members who frequent the setting with a regularity instilled by the routine of their everyday life, at no time other than a particular performance will exactly the same individuals be in the same setting witnessing exactly the same performance. Hence, even in a habitually attended setting such as a working men's club, a live audience must be ascribed with an ephemeral quality. This is a definitive characteristic of a live audience. It means that no two live audiences in the same setting for the same type of performance, or even the same performer, will be exactly the same in the way they interact with a performer. Consequently, performers have absolutely no assurance that they will be successful with their performance to a live audience. In stark contrast to performers on television who have the benefit of a positively motivated and 'warmed up' audience and the opportunity to rehearse and edit their performances in order to enhance the probability of success, a live performance to a live audience must succeed within the immediacy of the fleeting moment of time in which the performer and the unique audience meet.

In the same manner as a live audience is acknowledged as being ephemeral, so too is a live performance of humour. Although a stand-up comedian may perform the same routine on many consecutive nights, the joking content and

stylistic framework of the routine will vary from one night to the next, both within and between different venue settings, as audiences are changed for each performance and thus carry the potential to affect the performance in different ways. This is one more important point of difference between an audience for live performance humour and an audience for television humour. The point is developed by Cameron and Gillespie (1996), who argue that with regard to individual members of an audience attending live performance humour; they are in one sense to be perceived as relatively powerless in comparison to individuals watching a video recording of the same humorous performance. For example, if a member of a live audience fails to understand or does not hear part of the joking content of a performance, there is no recapping in the way that a viewer of a performance on video can rewind for clarification (p.17). Also, if members of a live audience do not like a performance they do not have the same freedom to change it to an alternative form of entertainment in the way that a television/video viewer may choose to watch something else. Further, as members of a live audience, individuals have less control over the rate at which a performance happens in the way in which they have control over humour in media such as reading a novel, or viewing a video. In live performance the pace is set by the performer and to some extent by the interaction between the performer and the audience as a social entity (pp.17-18). Even heckling is regarded as reflecting an audience as a social entity, as to heckle as an individual who effectively breaks the social norms of the occasion is to expose the heckler to censure from other audience members for spoiling the occasion.

Composition

The third feature of a live audience to a live performance relates to the social traits, desires and responses of audiences. The social traits of an audience differ according to time, place and type of performance and can reflect composite individual member differences such as gender, age, social class, race etc. Although it is extremely problematical to attempt to draw generalisations about the specific social characteristics of a particular audience, it is acknowledged to

be acceptable to argue that the social composition of an audience, who choose to attend an ET3M performance by Bernard Manning for example, will be significantly different from the composition of an audience to a CT3M performance by Jenny Eclair for example. The importance of social characteristics of an audience is highlighted by Dolan (1988), who points to 'the varied responses of spectators mixed across ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, and class' (p.121). Palmer (1994) argues that the success or failure of a comic performance depends heavily on the 'match or mismatch between the comic's material and the social characteristics of a particular audience' and that 'different audiences have different stylistic and thematic preferences in comedy' (p.161). Thus the thematic structure of performances identified as belonging to one of the three type categories established in chapter two and which is more specifically detailed by the exact group positioning within a type, as reflected by the number and letter code introduced in chapter three, is accepted as an indication of composite social characteristics of an audience for a particular type of performance. For example, Wagg (in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.) 1996) argues that a clearly discernible audience composition existed for 'Alternative comedy' in comedy clubs in the 1980's and it was made up of young, educated, variously middle class professionals which was confirmed by the 'growth in the demand for 'alternative' comedy by companies - comics performed at business conferences, for example, and the London comedy venue Jongleurs supplied companies like Saatchi and Saatchi .... also around this time promoters began taking comedy to colleges, universities and arts centres' (p.326). Today, 'circuit' performers (which is the type put forward in the thesis to have replaced 'alternative' comedy) who perform in the same venue setting categories, are still acknowledged as having a social audience composition of what Spillius (1995) refers to as the 'graduate classes'

Class

The broadest social characteristic that is generally accepted as contributing to a thematic match between performance and audience to underpin the success of

live performance humour, is that of class. McGrath (1981) claims there is a conspicuous difference between middle class and working class audiences regarding 'taste' and what is expected of a performer and performance. This observation is based on audience responses to what he refers to as 'comedy club acts' and theatre productions which are regarded as being comedies in venues throughout Britain. He claims that working class audiences demand a high level of comic skill from performers and the jokes they tell have to be 'good'. The jokes will be assessed as 'good' or 'bad' purely on the basis of how funny they are, as measured by their ability to make members of the audience laugh. They are not regarded as being good on any other set of criteria such as how clever they are, or how topical or inventive.[1] Part of the reason for this, he believes, is that people from working class backgrounds incorporate humour into their everyday lives by telling jokes about themselves, their bosses and their partners for example, so that when they go to see a performer who classes themselves as being a 'professional comedian' the expect to watch someone who is funnier than they are and has more talent than themselves or their friends. McGrath claims that for working class audiences comedy has to be 'sharper, more perceptive, and more deeply related to their lives' (p.55). Alexander (1996) supports the view that entertainers appearing before working class audiences are likely to succeed with material that refers directly to the lived experiences of their everyday life; and this is why so much material 'reflects the central role that drinking plays in working class life' (p.71).

McGrath states that he found much of the content of working class comedy to be sexist, racist and anti-working class; and the material which elicited the best responses from working class audiences was that which referred to local events and well known characters. These audiences also preferred comedy performances from performers who they felt really wanted to be there and who cared about their local and cultural identity. He refers Billy Connolly's success in his native city of Glasgow as a prime example. However, he did find working class audiences to be very demanding of comedy performers. If an act failed to reach the standard they expected they would not hesitate in letting the performer

know. If they found an act to be boring then it would not be uncommon for them to chat amongst themselves, leave or throw objects at the stage. These identified audience characteristics will be argued in chapter six to be motivated more by the institutional factors associated with the physical and social environment of a working men's club venue setting, rather than being produced by an excessively vague and conveniently conceptualised factor of social class.

As a comparison to his findings on a working class audience, McGrath found middle class audiences to be somewhat different, both in what they wanted in terms of the joking content of live performance humour and in their physical responses as an audience to the quality of a performance. He found middle class audiences to be more restrained in their responses to a performance, which he claims to be partly a result of their social education, as middle class people have been trained to sit quietly through performances whether they be good or bad. Again, however, this could be argued to be more the result of the social context of the venue setting in which a performance takes place, rather than some expedient ubiquitous trait of a social class. The research undertaken for this thesis has found that it would be a more substantive argument to refer 'the middle class trait of passivity' to the institutional directives of the theatre venue setting, given that high profile middle class audiences in contemporary venue settings and in early alternative comedy clubs (identified by Cook, 1994; Wagg, 1996), were and are notoriously active to the point of destroying performances.

McGrath makes the case that that middle class audiences are looking for material which made them think more about the joking references and how they are used creatively and stylistically to produce the humour of a performance. Yet, he states that he found some of the working class material to be anarchic and the material preferred by the middle classes to be more conservative. One further point put forward by McGrath is that middle class audiences showed no preference for material reflecting the area's local identity and he attributes this to the claim that the middle classes are more cosmopolitan.

Sex

Whether or not the sex of a significant number of members of an audience has a determining effect on the (un)successfulness of live performance humour is undecided. Borden (1975) argues that a male audience is more aggressive than a female audience and Holland (1982) refers to research that identifies aggressiveness in men accounting for their preferences for jokes that express hostility directly, while women prefer subtle verbal hostility, especially against men (p.63). Gender based differences in preferred joking material are supportable from observations of 'extreme' type performances given to single sex audiences on occasions such as 'stag nights' for men and 'hen nights' for women, both of which have been undertaken as part of the research for the study. However, one of the main questions regarding the influence of sex as a constituent factor in the composition of an audience, is whether or not males and females in the same audience find the same jokes funny. Terry and Ertel (1974) found that there were differences. They found that men enjoyed sexual humour more than women and that the humour males preferred was more aggressive. The male preference for sexual humour is further developed by Chapman and Gadfield (1976) who argue that this preference only existed if the material did not threaten traditional views of masculinity or undermine the status of men. Chapman and Gadfield claim that women prefer 'absurd' humour, while Zillman and Stocking (1976) found that women preferred humour that was self-disparaging and that it made no difference whether it was performed by a male or a female. They found that men, however, preferred humour that mocked someone else, especially if that someone else was a women. This was supported by Cantor (1976) who found that both men and women preferred the butt of a joke to be a female regardless of the what the joke was about.

Cupchik and Leventhal (1974) argue that men rate humorous material more objectively and independently than women. They argue that men focus on the content of the material and pay less attention than women to their overt responses to the material. They clarify this finding stating that women are more

likely to pay attention to their overt responses than men and may adjust them to fit in with the reactions of other women and perhaps the whole audience. According to research carried out by Gallagher and Shuntich (1981), and Wagner, MacDonald and Manstead (1986) the overt way in which women express their appreciation or dislike of a piece of humorous material is different to that of men, with women being found to be more facially expressive than men. While little research has been done on the way that a mixed sex audience receives and responds to humorous material, one piece of research by Young and Fyre (1966) suggests that the way one sex responds to a particular joke can be influenced by the way the other sex responds. In an experiment carried out with American male undergraduates Young and Fyre separated the subjects so that they were first part of a single sex then a mixed sex audience. In both groups they were placed with people they did not know and the material performed was about sex. The researchers found that when the whole audience consisted only of males, the subjects found the jokes to be funny and laughed out loud. In a mixed audience in which the females did not laugh at the material or looked embarrassed by its content, the responses of the males were less vociferous. When the women did laugh at the material then the men laughed louder than they had when they were members of a male only audience. Young and Fyre claim as a result, that the responsiveness of one group within an audience is dependent on the responses of other groups.[2]

Holland (1982) notes that there is a lot of research which claims that there is no significant difference between what the two sexes find funny and that there are basic points of criticism to be levelled against research that says there is. The criticisms revolve around the meaningfulness of research that relies heavily on the way the joking material was presented to the subjects. For example, if the subject was alone, or if a joke was told as a 'one-off' and not part of a comedy routine, then this would effect how the joke was received as and appreciated as being funny or not. Holland also questions whether this would this be equally applicable to either sex? Palmer (1994) develops the criticism further by stating that the material was presented to women in a particular style, without any

account being taken of which style of comic delivery women preferred: did they prefer the isolated one off joke or a more conversational/observational style for example? (p.70).

Interaction

The point has been made throughout the chapter that the interaction of a live audience with a live performance occurs on two levels. One is a private level where individual members of an audience interact with a performance on the basis of their private reading of the content references of the joking material. The second is a social level where members of an audience interact as a group and accept the normative conventions of group responses to a performance. Palmer (1994) encompasses both the social and the private levels of audience interaction with live performance humour in his identification of three variables which can affect whether an audience finds joking material funny or offensive. The first is 'the structure of the joke itself, considered as a representation of the world external to the joke.' The second is 'the relationship between the joke-teller and the others involved in the enunciation - the butt and the audience.' The third is 'the nature of the occasion on which the attempt at humour is made' (p.164). These will now be considered.

As the private level recognises that each individual is able to read a joking reference on the basis of how it represents the world as it relates directly to the individual, the range of factors that affect whether an individual in an audience finds a joke funny or offensive are extremely diverse. They range across an extensively personalised spectrum of beliefs, experiences, biography, individual circumstances, institutional affiliations and personality type, for example - and also include factors, 'as varied as, class, age, sex, height, anxiety, number of traffic violations, and being on a diet!' (Holland, 1982, p.63). There is, therefore, a high probability that some joking references used as part of the content of a performance, will have the potential to offend some individual members of an audience whose personalised perspectives affect how the

references are read. However, individual members of an audience are faced with the constraining power of the social audience as a group within a recognised occasion for live performance humour. This effectively restricts the potential of joking material to fail with individual audience members on a private level, because it mitigates against a level of offence being legitimately experienced by individuals within the social context of the occasion for live performance humour. Calvert (1949) argues,

> it is also reasonable to assume that even when the material presented is found unfunny by an individual but occasions uproarious laughter in others, this group laughter may exert pressure to conform.
>
> (Calvert, cited in Martin and Gray, 1996, p.222)

Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington (1974) have already been mentioned as an example of research that emphasises the positive effect of group laughter on individual members of an audience to find things funny rather than offensive. Nevertheless, there is a responsibility on the part of a performer to ensure that joking references used in a performance do not reach a more general point beyond private individual members, where they offend an audience as a group. If, for any reason, the joking material used in a performance does offend a 'live' audience as a social entity, then the performance is likely to fail with the audience. Mangham and Overington (1987) argue that this is why comedians look carefully for audience responses and wait for positive signals from an audience as a group before going on with the next line (p.87). When performers are not interacting effectively with an audience, they risk missing the responsive cues that Fine (1983) recognises as being something that comedians must continually adjust to in order to be successful (p.164). A performer who is not able to recognise responsive cues from an audience and does not adapt to them accordingly, immediately jeopardises the likelihood of a performance being successful and this clearly illustrates the definitive interactive characteristic of a live audience for live performance humour.

Simon Fanshawe picked on some woman and she said to him, quite clearly "Why don't you stop picking on me and say something funny?" She sounded rather serious, and quite justified as well. You could sense the audience thinking, "Yeah - fucking right. Leave her alone!" And he said "Oooh!" and went for her again. You could almost hear the audience's sympathy rushing towards this woman and away from Fanshawe, but he didn't clock it. With every line that he was doing against her he was alienating himself a little bit more.

(Arthur Smith (CT2M performer) cited in Cook, 1994, pp.204-5)

Jeff Green, as CT3M performer recalls,

> There were some Irish lads in, and he (the comedian) was banging away at them. They were having a go at him, and he was having a go at them, and then he said. "Have you left any packages round here?" Someone shouted out, "Not everyone from Ireland's a terrorist, you know," and the whole crowd cheered. He was completely destroyed.
>
> (cited in Cook, 1994, p.208)

In extreme cases such failure to read the interactive cues from an audience as a group can threaten the personal safety of the performer and, indeed, some have been assaulted.[3] Roy 'Chubby' Brown, (an ET2M performer) who has a strong reputation as an uncompromisingly 'blue' comedian, made his reputation by presenting his audiences with joking material that aimed to shock by pushing conservative category-routinised references to outrageous limits. Through various pre-production factors such as advertising posters that warned individuals to 'stay away if easily offended', Brown's audiences attended his performances with the expectation of 'offensive' material being used. Nevertheless, on numerous occasions Brown has dangerously misjudged the responses of an audience as a group and as a result has had to be escorted from the venue setting by his personal body-guards for his own safety. One such occasion was a remark he made to an audience in a working men's club in Cleveland at the time of the publication of the Butler-Sloss Report on child abuse in the county: he said he was surprised to see anyone in the club that night because he thought they would 'all be at home fucking their kids'.

To minimise the risk of failure as far as possible, all performers in each type category usually begin their performances with what they term 'trigger jokes' in

order to 'sound out' an audience. Judgements are made by the performer on the basis of their perceptions of the audience's response to the 'trigger jokes'. A perceptible response, such as a positive response like a laugh, offers the performer a degree of confirmation as to the nature of the audience as a group, which allows the performer to feel more assured to make informed decisions as to what joking material to use to be successful with the audience. Brittan (1973) argues that the part an audience plays in shaping the actual performance must not be under-estimated. He claims a (live) audience 'exerts both a constraining and liberating influence' on the performer and performance (p.118) and that audiences act as a constraint on the performer, as,

> in order to establish some form of social rapport, the actor has to canalize his conduct so that he is understandable to the other - he must be convincing, he must perform at a level which is meaningful to the audience, but simultaneously his performance may be liberating in that each time he performs, there is the possibility that both actor and audience mutually construct new categories of meaning.
>
> (Brittan, 1973, p.118)

Live humorous performers acknowledge that the inter-relationship with an audience, that Brittan alludes to in terms of a dyadic construction of meaning, is a reciprocal process that occurs throughout the entire duration of a performance. This is why they accept that they must continually monitor the responses from an audience in order to adjust accordingly to meet the expectations of the audience. It is only by doing so that they are able to successfully maintain a quality of relationship with an audience that actively facilitates the humour of the performance. Rutter (1996) reiterates this point of meaningful interaction between audience and performer in his consideration of how the emphasis of comedy has changed over the last twenty years from what he regards as 'modern to postmodern'. He argues,

> the emphasis in comedy has changed from a words and meaning system of joke telling in which the humorous stimulus is provided for the passive enjoyment of the audience to a comedy in which very little can be taken for granted, anything is open to debate, and the audience as much as the performer can take an active role in the dialogue.
>
> (Rutter, p.311, in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.) 1996)

Equally importantly, a performer must be able to adapt their behaviour to accommodate negative responses from a dissatisfied audience. Dissatisfied responses include not paying attention, talking with other audience members, heckling, throwing objects at the performer and even physically assaulting the performer. Fine (1983) points out that 'some audiences are characterized as "good" and others as "dead" or "hostile", but there has not been research on what the factors are that lead to such classifications' (p.164). A key factor that the research for this thesis has identified as leading to such 'classifications', is the effect of the combination of individual physical and social factors comprising the social context of a venue setting on audience behaviour. A second factor put forward by McGrath (1981) is that the growth of mass media, especially television, has had an effect on shaping the expectations of what an audience at live performance humour will want from a performance. He argues that being able to watch performers of a high standard on television has resulted in audiences demanding the same high standard from a performer they go to see in a live situation. Performers who have had television exposure attract audiences with a developed ideal of what the performer should be like in terms of their expectations of content material and the style in which it is to be performed; and the quality of the live performance is judged against a media constructed ideal (p.33). McGrath goes on to state that the same television audience will also make up the majority of an audience to a live performance and this may put the performer under pressure to deliver what they perceive a live audience has come to expect from them. Even when an audience has no knowledge of a particular performer that has been booked to appear at a venue, there is likely to be a knowledge of the type of performance that is usual to the venue setting. Knowledge of an unknown performer appearing in a venue setting is also available from pre-production factors such as advertising. The result is that audience expectations are established and dissatisfaction can stem from the failure of a performance to fulfil those expectations. A similar fate can await 'open mike' performers in comedy clubs -despite the fact that these performances are given by amateurs and not by 'professional' performers, an

audience will still expect them to perform to the same standard as 'professionals' (Cook, 1994).

However, it is difficult to support the assumption that certain displays of audience behaviour definitely reflect a genuine dissatisfaction with a live performance of humour. This is to say, that some forms of audience behaviour, such as heckling or talking during a performance, that would categorically indicate dissatisfaction with a performance in some venue settings, will be far less damnatory to a performance in other venue settings. Such displays must, therefore, be considered within the complete social context of live performance humour. For example, in some venue settings, on some occasions for live performance humour, heckling is actively encouraged[4] and some performers, from each of the three types that have been established in the thesis, encourage heckling or at least direct banter with members of an audience and make this an integral part of their performances. Cook (1994) argues that in contrast to the disciplined theatre audience which sits silently through a performance, only laughing or applauding at appropriate cues, audiences at some comedy club venues are far more interactive and consider it perfectly acceptable to hurl abuse at the performer. He claims there is an,

> implicit understanding that allows the audience to pitch in on equal terms with the person behind the mike - a comedic right to bear arms is the first article of comedy's unwritten constitution.
>
> (Cook, 1994, pp.215-6)

Heckling, according to Cook, gives a live audience an element of control over a performance, 'the punters set the agenda ..... the comic must adapt or die'(p.216). However, this is a complex area of audience interaction as there are many different types of heckling. Some heckling is directly involved with the dialogue of the performance and invites the performer to respond as a means of examining their competence as a humorous performer. Some heckling is aimed to win approval from other members of the audience from the heckler being able to compete with the performer. Here the individual heckler becomes a performer and has a live audience in attendance to define him or her as such. Some

heckling is an embittered exclamation of dissatisfaction that is designed specifically to attack a performance. Some heckling may appear to be aimed at undermining the status of a performer as being competent, but is actually a strategic ploy carried out by a 'plant' in the audience to feed the performer with material they can respond to with a stinging humorous (prepared rather than spontaneous) retort.[5] While the type of heckling and the extent to which it is accepted as a normalised part of the occasion of live performance humour varies from one venue setting to another, it does epitomise the essential interactive character of a live audience for live performance humour. Heckling is the practical embodiment of both the private and social aspects of a live audience in that it enables individual members (who wish to do so) to express their private readings of joking elements in a performance; and it also facilitates the development of inter-relations between individual members of an audience upon which the characteristic groupness of a social audience is built - even if the sense of groupness is formed to censure a disruptive individual heckler who is deemed by the group to be spoiling the performance for the live audience as a social entity.

Conclusion

Although it is extremely difficult to define exactly the constituent features of a live audience for live performance humour, a number of features have been identified as characteristic. The chapter has identified the sociological significance of specific non-performance factors such as size, gender and social class, for example, that contribute to the formation of 'groupness' of a 'live ' audience as a social entity. Hence, the 'liveness' of an audience refers at once to the 'groupness' of a number of individuals who have gathered in a particular place in which a live performance (of humour) takes place. It has been shown that on a particular occasion in a particular venue setting, a particular combination of factors account for the interactive influence of a live audience in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. Therefore, regardless of how difficult it is to define and assess the significance of a live audience as a

non-performance factor, it must be considered as an integral and vital element in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

Chapter Six

The venue setting in which live performance humour takes place and the significance of an audience to a performance, have been put forward in chapters four and five as primary influences in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice. The aim of this chapter is to show how venue settings, within a particular category, can impose an institutionalised social context that is influential in forming an audience that can determine the (un)successfulness of live performance humour. In order to illustrate the influence of institutional aspects of venue setting on the formation of a social context for live performance humour, working men's clubs will be used as an example of a venue setting category. The category is chosen for two main reasons; first, it is one of the most common venue settings for live performance humour in the UK (Tremlett, 1987) and secondly, because it is a highly institutionalised setting as a result of a series of historical, social and political factors.

The institutionalisation of a venue setting

The original idea to set up working men's clubs was formed in the mid-19th Century, and was inspired by what was perceived by the founders to be a real need to offer ordinary working class men a place to go in their non-work time that could serve as a stimulating leisure alternative to drinking alcohol. As far back as the 1830's, reports had been made to a Select Committee on Drunkenness, to offer alternative sensible and formative recreation to replace drinking in public houses. Hence, the temperance commitment of a former Unitarian minister and graduate of London University called Henry Solly, with the help of aristocrats such as Lord Lyttleton and Lord Brougham, provided the impetus for the birth of social clubs that were dedicated to: 'encourage self-improvement and promote temperance among working men' (Tremlett, 1987). The earliest recorded club of this kind was open in Walthamstow, in London, in

1857. It offered members a snooker table, but only tea to drink between frames. As the number of clubs began to grow, Solly argued for them to be established within a Union with a written constitution to ensure that they were run along (what he and his aristocratic benefactors considered to be) the right principles. Williamson (1982) argues that this was one aspect of 'long-standing attempts at social amelioration', in that it was 'one of many late Victorian devices which attempted to penetrate the culture of the working classes with a view to changing it' (p.108). In July, 1862 the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (C.I.U.) was set up with Solly at its head. In a manifesto outlining the Union's aims, Solly wrote,

> This union is formed for the purpose of helping Working Men to establish Clubs or Institutes where they can meet for conversation, business and mental improvement, with the means of recreation and refreshment, free from intoxicating drinks; these Clubs, at the same time, constituting Societies for mutual helpfulness in various ways.
>
> (cited in Tremlett, 1987, p.13)

The slow movement of clubs towards the Union was seen to be largely as a result of Solly's insistence on the temperance theme. By 1865 a resolution was passed allowing the sale of beer. Solly resigned as a consequence of the resolution, but the organisational features of unionisation were left in place. For example, clubs developed a membership system based on the payment of yearly subscriptions; a committee was to be elected by the membership of each club to officiate and run the club in accordance with the constitution of the C.I.U.; rules and regulations were laid down for members to abide by and disciplinary action was to be taken against offenders who breached instituted codes of behaviour. In short, working men's clubs were launched as a Union and encouraged to develop as institutionally affiliated settings with corresponding hierarchical organisational and administrative structures to those of Trade Unions.

At the time the C.I.U. was formed in 1862, Wright (1970) argues that unionisation was the only form of political organisation available to a working class that was effectively excluded from a basically aristocratic Parliament

(p.57). The Trades Union Congress developed in the late 1860's and became firmly established as an institutionalised form of working-class resistance. Pelling (1968) argues that this unionisation was founded more on workers' organisation to assert their control in the workplace rather than political radicalism, and that the radicalism of the day was to be found in the middle class rather than the unions (p.13). The unionisation of the working men's social clubs developed as a correlative and from the early 1870's working men began to assert their control in their place of leisure and, 'transformed the nature of the clubs themselves' (Williamson, 1982, p.108). Hence the institutional aspects of unionisation in terms of membership, rules, elections, leadership and designated officers such as Treasurer, Secretary and Chairman, were duplicated in the sphere of leisure in the working men's clubs from the unionisation taking place in the workplace.

The manner in which social influences came to have a bearing on the institutionalisation of working men's clubs, is acknowledged to have stemmed mainly from the way in which the clubs were positioned within the local working-class community (Dennis et.al., 1969; Williamson, 1982; Tremlett, 1987). The working-class co-operative ethos of working men's clubs which was encapsulated in a non-exploitative profit making motive, as represented by the lower price of beer, ensured clubs occupied a central location within the everyday life of the community. The day-to-day running of a club by members of the community, with shared lived experiences, also contributed to clubs being established as a part of what has been referred to as the 'lived culture' of the community (Hoggart, 1958; Williams, 1965). Working men's clubs developed as a working-class institution which offered working class people some greater degree of control over the conditions of their non-working lives. They are located within Giddens's conception of 'locale'. 'Locales refer to the use of space to provide the settings of interaction, the settings of interaction being essential to specifying its contextuality' (1984, p.118). Hence, they are recognised as being able to present members of a community with a social establishment with a particular status that could act as what Goffman (1959)

calls a 'front region' (p.109). This is to say that individual behaviour within the setting of a club would not be substantively different from that presented outside of it, and as a result a working-class image of 'self' would not be 'expressively inconsistent' with the status of a club (p.240). Consequently, the collective representation of a working-class image in the setting of a working men's club, contributes to the institutionalisation of the setting as a working-class social establishment that caters specifically to the leisure requirements of working-class people.

Clubs today

Nationally, the C.I.U. has nearly 4,000 affiliated clubs, with a total membership approaching 4,000,000.[1] The vast majority of clubs are directly affiliated, while the majority of those remaining have links with the C.I.U. through C.O.R.C.A. - The Committee of Registered Clubs Associations. Clubs are to be found in all parts of the UK, which the C.I.U. has divided into 29 administrative regions called branches. Some branches have a higher number of clubs than others. For example, the Durham branch is the largest with 249 (circa. 2000), and along with the branches of Northumberland and Cleveland provide the North-East of England with the highest concentration of clubs in the UK, with approximately 1,000,000 people - a quarter of the total membership - belonging to clubs in the region.[2] In the Northumberland town of Ashington (circa 1995), for example, clubs out-numbered pubs by a ratio of 7:1.

Wylie (1993) points out that clubs in the North-East are under threat. He claims that the decline in traditional heavy industries in the North-East, like coal and shipbuilding, coupled with a 30 per cent decrease in male employment over the preceding 20 years, has allowed women to undermine club life. With their increased employment and earnings and having been 'so long excluded from the region's culture', women are now in an economic position to turn their backs on the clubs and head for Newcastle city centre's Bigg Market, which he states 'is a weekend focal point for young women staking their claim to an area where there

are no social restrictions or taboos - where they make the rules and call the shots.' Thus causing the young men of the villages and towns 'to forsake the clubs of their fathers and grandfathers for the lights and lasses of the Bigg Market.' Wylie argues this points to 'a dismal future for clubland'. However, working men's clubs are commercial business ventures and therefore strive to remain economically viable by attempting to respond to changes that threaten their existence.

The responses that have been made by clubs to strengthen and secure their market position have been numerous and varied. Significant changes that have taken place within many clubs have been aimed at attracting business from increased 'wet' sales (beer and spirits), by giving clubs a broader appeal to divergent sections of the adult drinking population. In particular, they have tried to attract the custom of younger drinkers from 18 to 34 years of age (See Appendix 2, note 3). Hence numerous clubs have developed facilities such as, increasing the range of alcoholic beverages available, standards of furnishing and interior decoration and design, especially in those sections of the club that are used by women (as will be explained later in the chapter) and providing music entertainment aimed at younger people. For example, many clubs now offer a wide range of beers and lagers in much the same way as bars and 'freehouse' public houses that are not tied to sell the products of a particular brewery. Historically the vast majority of C.I.U. clubs, especially in the North-East of England, have had exclusive ties with the Federation brewery based in Dunston, Newcastle upon Tyne.[3] However, clubs that have aimed to increase their competitiveness as a drinking outlet, have broken this traditional single brewery supplier arrangement in an attempt to attract custom with an extensive and competitively priced range of market-leader products. This has resulted in an increased choice of beers and spirits, as well as the inclusion of more fashionable alcoholic beverages that younger drinkers find more appealing, such as the tabloid labelled 'designer drinks' and 'alco-pops'.

Another response from many clubs attempting to win custom has been to introduce forms of entertainment that are aimed to cater for, or at least make concession to, the tastes that are perceived to be held by a younger drinking clientele. One aspect of this mooted appeal to younger custom has resulted in some clubs providing disc jockeys to play popular youth scene music on one of the high point weekend nights. One example of this is the Central club in Stanley, County Durham, which has established itself as a principal weekend venue for young people in the town. Some clubs, such as the Neon in Jarrow, South Tyneside, set aside a weekday night every week for young members to stage the type of bands they prefer.

While the aim of the initiatives mentioned above is to generate some appeal with young people in order to help secure the financial base of a club from revenue from new young customer/members, the general opinion of club members, who participated in a straw poll conducted by myself at seven clubs in County Durham, in August 1996,[4] was that the best music entertainment strategy to attract people to come and drink in a club, is to book highly competent professional bands that have an established reputation for playing cover versions that sound like the original recordings of past and present popular chart music hits; and that such bands should be booked to appear on high point weekend nights and advertised. The same rationale was applied to booking 'good' professional comedians. Hence two main theatrical agencies concerned with booking acts into working men's clubs in the North-East (Beverley Entertainment Agency Ltd. and West End Theatrical Agency), confirm that while they have more musical acts on their books than comedians, they do have an established number of comedians who continue to work regularly in the clubs.[5] Both of these agencies maintain they will continue to represent 'comedy acts and comedians' and insist that they will do so because they have absolutely no doubt that as long as the clubs survive in a form that provides live professional entertainers, there will always be room for the work of a man or woman who dares to presume they can make people laugh.

Membership

One aspect of working men's clubs that has remained constant since the time of their inception, is the requirement that people must apply to join their local club, because they are based upon an associate membership system. A prospective member must be sponsored by two validated members of the particular club receiving the application. The final decision as to whether or not an application is successful rests with the governing committee of a club. On average a club will have twelve committee members (although it can be as few as six) who are members of the club they have been elected to office in, by the other members of the club. If accepted the applicant will receive a set of personally registered club cards. Members pay an initial fee of £2 and a yearly subscription of about £1.00 to keep their club cards valid.[6] In keeping with the historicism of the working men's club movement, the most obviously perceived advantage of this restricted membership access is that the beer in clubs is cheaper than in pubs.[7] Access to a particular club is therefore restricted to those who are members of the club and those classed as 'visitors'.

In strict accordance with the constitution of the working men's Club and Institute Union, a visitor is an invited guest into a club, who can utilise club facilities such as bingo, snooker, raffles and draws, and watch performances, but cannot partake in one of the principal benefits afforded to members: the consumption of alcohol at cheaper club prices. However, this restriction on visitors drinking alcohol has ceased to be enforced. There are two categories of visitor currently in effect and a third category that has been abandoned in recent years in the majority of clubs. First, those who are not members of a club, but who have been vouchsafed by a male member of the club they wish to enter through a procedure known as 'signing in'. Each male member of a club has the right to sign in to the club he is a member of, a maximum of two visitors on any given day. The second visitor category consists of men who hold a valid membership with a club that is affiliated to the C.I.U., and who can gain entry to any affiliated club by signing themselves in as a visitor to the club. The third category of visitor to a working

men's club used to be women, because women were not allowed to become members of clubs and therefore relied on their male partners, as members, to sign them in. Today women still do not have the equality of holding associate membership, although they have been granted what is in effect a half membership status, which means they no longer have to be signed in to the club they are half members of. However, they do not hold associate membership privileges, such as being able to sign other people in to their club, or visit other clubs without having to be signed in to it by a male member of that club.[8]

The actual signing in process for an associate member visiting another affiliated club, involves filling in their name, address and membership number on a date recorded declaration slip contained in a large book ledger divided into ten slips per page. Each slip is to be completed with a signature. For non-members visiting a club, only the member who is signing the person in can sign a slip and its counterfoil to authorise legitimate entry. The counterfoil is called a 'chitty', which is torn from the ledger and given to the visitor to be retained as proof of legitimate entry. Any member of the governing committee of a club can call upon a visitor to produce their chitty at any time during their attendance at the club and can instruct the person to leave if they fail to produce it or comply with the request. This rarely happens, and remains a largely redundant practice for two main reasons. First, the commercial drive to secure business has resulted in a relaxation in the rules of entry to some clubs. Secondly, the majority of clubs continue to institute the more constitutionally correct and effective practice of employing a doorman, whose specific task is to execute the whole clerical administration of member and visitor entry into a club.

In order to increase revenue by increasing the number of customers, some clubs have instigated, or at least tolerated, a relaxation of the conditions of entry which imposed restrictions on custom and, therefore, the money making potential of the club. However, the constitutional malpractice of open entry has backfired on a number of clubs. For example, a club in Consett, County Durham, called the Steel Club, relaxed entry restrictions and younger drinkers began to use the club

as a starting point for Friday and Saturday night pub crawls around the town. This was because of the relatively cheaper price of drinks in the club and the view that they could 'have a few' to get their evening's drinking entertainment started. The perceived advantage of this to the younger weekend Steel club drinkers, was that they could be sufficiently intoxicated by the time they reached one of the night clubs in the town, not to have to spend too much of their money in them on relatively expensive drinks. The Steel Club became firmly established as part of the younger drinkers' weekend routine and this resulted in members of the club complaining that they 'couldn't get a seat in their own club'. They became intolerant of the influx of 'not even proper visitors', who were perceived to be taking advantage of club privileges that they were not entitled to. The club committee responded to the growing criticism of relaxed entry in a manner that some members regarded as being petulant and 'over the top'. A security coded door lock was fitted to the main front doors and only members were given the four number code. This proved awkward for some members who either forgot the code or had difficulty seeing the small numbers on the key pad. On one occasion I found a pitifully exasperated old man knocking on the key pad with his knuckles. He asked plaintively if I knew how to get the door open for him to get into his club.

In order to attract younger custom and avoid the kind of problems encountered by the Steel club in Consett, the Central club, in Stanley, County Durham, initiated a membership scheme that was directly targeted at younger drinkers. It involved individuals being registered with a membership card that entitled them to pay a 50p entry fee into a designated room in the club. The membership cards could easily be obtained by filling in a simple form stating name, address and age. The applicant was not required to supply any evidence of identification to validate the application, or provide the names of existing club members to vouch for them (as with an associate membership application). Consequently, membership cards were issued to young people who had falsified their personal details and were under the legal age to drink alcohol. While the Central club enjoyed an increase in revenue from new young members filling a section of the

club on weekend nights, it did fall victim to its own success as more and more young and under-age drinkers gained entry. This culminated in a police raid in December 1996 which produced several arrests on drug related and drinking offences. The Central club responded by replacing the membership cards with more strictly validated personal identity cards that carry photographs. It also employed doormen to monitor legitimate entry into the club.

The vast majority of working men's clubs use doormen. However, unlike doormen working in pubs, bars and night clubs, who are paid essentially for their physical abilities to 'bounce' (eject) trouble-makers from an establishment, a C.I.U. club doorman will sit in a purpose built booth just inside the main entrance and is more likely to be mistaken for a grandfather than a 'bouncer'. This is because he is concerned only with the administrative detail of checking that visitors to a club sign in to the club and that members have valid membership cards. Any trouble-makers in a working men's club are dealt with by members of the club's governing committee, who have the power to 'bar' (suspend) offending individuals for a stipulated period of time, or even ban them from the club for life. Offenders are called to appear before the committee, usually on a Sunday morning, to receive their penalty and are officially barred from the club until they make their appearance. This works as an effective controlling factor in regulating behaviour and is symptomatic of the high level of institutionalisation of working men's clubs.

Because of the membership requirement, individuals develop ties of loyalty to their club.[9] They see the club as 'theirs' because they belong to it and have a say in how it is run by being able to stand for or vote for the governing committee. They go to 'their' club regularly and routinely and see this as part of the normal pattern of their everyday life. To be excluded from it is seen to be a real penalty and a viable deterrent to 'inappropriate behaviour'. The most common forms of inappropriate behaviour resulting in a period of suspension from a club include; 'bad language' being used in sections of a club where women are present; foul and abusive behaviour; and fighting in a club. Members will receive written

warnings from their committee for lesser offences such as making a noise during bingo. Some members have received life bans that extend to every club in the C.I.U. nationally. I am aware of two such cases, both of which involved committee members holding the post of treasurer and absconding with club funds.

The job of doorman in a working men's club is usually undertaken by stalwart members of a club for the usual recompense of a couple of pints of beer, entrants' 'donations' into an ashtray and a derivative social status from the social and institutional frameworks of the club. The institutional framework of a working men's club affords a doorman a position from which status can be achieved on the basis of his perceived authority to apply club rules either to grant or restrict entry. This observation is supported by customary features associated with a cliché guard dog image of the position. It is an image that has developed as a common source of humorous reference for performers working in the clubs. A 'mainstream' MT1 performer called Bobby Pattinson, who has worked extensively in the clubs in the North-East of England, will name a club (usually a local rival to the one he is performing in) with the most 'spiteful' doorman. He often uses the joke that a German invasion of Britain would have been 'knackered' once it got to X club, 'cause there's no way them panzas would've got past that doorman without club cards'. Such references to the stereotypical severity of an authoritarian club doorman perpetuate an enduring image of the institutional formality of working men's clubs.

Within the social organisation of working men's clubs, the position of doorman also affords status from the way it is recognised as representing a commitment to the ethos of the club movement - that is, a club member working to help in the running of a club to benefit a group of members. Irrespective of whether or not a doorman is perceived to be someone who would not mind being isolated in a small booth throughout the course of an evening, away from the pleasurable atmosphere of the drinking areas, his willingness to do the job effectively

represents his status as a 'club man' - a status that is based upon the individual's position within a social and formally associated group membership,

> that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership
>
> (Tajfel, 1981, p.63)

In the club

A typical working men's club is divided into three different self-contained drinking areas; the 'bar'; the 'lounge' and the 'concert room'. The 'bar' is usually the second largest of the three rooms and is set aside for male members to meet and drink. The vast majority of clubs do not allow women into the bar (some do not allow women to enter any part of the club premises). It is not common for many women to make use of the bar area in the clubs that do allow them to go in, which can, in part, be explained by women experiencing an unwelcoming masculine atmosphere.

Stearns (1990) argues that exclusive male drinking/leisure domains, that promote a masculine atmosphere, are the result of leisure emerging as a male resource as the 'working class steadily elaborated a male-based recreational pattern', based primarily on a 'growing budget manipulation by working class husbands' (p.103). He claims that the phenomenon of working men drinking together became established as a principal expression of manhood. Hey (1986) refers to Whitehead's work on drinking in public houses which 'identifies a number of male-initiated social regulations, behaviours that are not specific to this social organism' (p.54). Brake (1980) argues that Whitehead concludes that these behaviours form a 'cult of masculinism which are a normal feature of heterosexual men in groups' (cited in Hey, 1986, p.55). Hey argues a corollary to the masculinism displayed in public houses is the need to ensure its continuance by segregation from femininity; and the exclusion of women drinking pints removes an attack on manliness (p.54). This is supported by Strate (2000) who gives account of the way beer contributes to pre-existing

cultural conceptions that form the myth of masculinity. Gofton (1986) points out that it is not just a case of drinking beer that is a significant identifying practice of masculinity, rather it is the type of beer and the quantity consumed that is of primary importance. He argues that it is the ability of the drinker to 'hold' his drink that is a common sign of manhood and that being able to 'hold' dark beers has a more traditional masculine status over lighter lager beers preferred by younger men (pp.253-77). The practice of drinking pints of beer exclusively with other men in the bar of a working men's club is, therefore, acknowledged as a signifying practice of masculine identity that can be articulated as a binary distinction with femininity, which is, according to Derrida's concept of 'logocentrism', 'based upon an exclusion of what is not' (Derrida, cited in Rutherford, 1992, p.76). The bar is not feminine: it is based upon the physical exclusion of what it is not. However, the exclusion of women from the bar area of a working men's club does not apply to serving staff, who are typically female, as indeed they are in the lounge and concert room areas of most clubs. Hey (1986) explains that this is in-keeping with the normal patriarchal patterns of sexual social organisation found within commercial drinking establishments (pp.39-59).

The masculine atmosphere of the bar in a working men's club is further enhanced by it being the most basic of the three drinking areas in terms of furnishing and decor. This visually clarifies a masculine form of signification to the clientele of the bar; in that men are not bothered as to whether a hint of apple green in the emulsion on the walls would bring out the playfulness of the ochre in the random fleck carpet tiles. Rather, the connotation of low decor is that men are not bothered about it because they are more concerned about the quality of beer and other activities that enter the discourse of their leisure time, such as darts, dominoes, pool, snooker and gambling on horse racing they can watch on television in the bar. Hence, both the decor and the amenities of the bar function to inculcate a masculine atmosphere in their symbolic and practical provision of traditional drinking environment preferences of men in working men's clubs.

The lounge is usually the smallest and best furnished room in a club. It is designed to provide a comfortable setting for couples to drink with their friends. This area acts as a counterpoint to the bar and is more considerate of the attendance of women in a club. Hence, the provision of bingo and a ruling against the use of bad language that can result in offenders being expelled from a club and having their membership suspended. Under this code of conduct the chauvinism of the bar passes as chivalry in the lounge, as men who use foul and abusive language in the bar take it upon themselves to censure those who do not respect the presence of women in the lounge. While couples do make use of the lounge, it is commonplace for male partners to slope off into the bar for most of the evening and nobly, 'leave the women to their bingo'.[10] It is common for some couples, especially on weekday nights, to part company as soon as they enter the club and only meet up again when it is time to go home.

The concert room is designed for club members to watch live performances from professional entertainers on a weekend night. There are marked variations in the size of this room from one club to another. Some of the larger clubs have concert rooms licensed to seat up to 600 people, although about 250 is more the average. The layout of this room typically incorporates a prominent stage with spot and coloured lighting and sound amplification equipment. A drum kit and an electric Hammond type organ are standard fixtures, as each club will have its resident musicians who will play dance music, provide backing for a professional performance if required, or provide accompaniment for members who wish to get up on stage and sing. Members singing on stage usually happens on at least one night of the week and is called a 'go-as-you-please' night, which many members regard as a traditional part of the routine of working men's clubs. However, unlike playfully frivolous karaoke singers in other establishments, club members take their performances seriously and many establish reputations as good singer/performers, which is a significant consideration to be made of concert room audiences to professional performers that will be developed later in the chapter. There is a dance floor space immediately in front of the stage and beyond that, on a carpeted area, an arrangement of easy clean Formica topped

tables that is designed to maximise seating rather than to facilitate viewing of the stage. There are bar facilities in the concert room to enable members to buy drinks without having to leave the room. While the bar in the concert room is usually at the opposite end of the room to the stage, it may run adjacent to it in some clubs. A concert room in full swing on a Saturday night is a noisy smoky place with hundreds of people talking, laughing and drinking - and booming above all this is either the loud amplified voice of a professional comedian, the music of a professional singer or band, or the distinctive sound of organ and drums being played. The only time the concert room is quiet on a busy weekend night, is reverentially for bingo.

Because concert rooms are not used routinely through the week as a drinking area within a club, and feature at weekend nights that traditionally represent higher entertainment expectations, dress codes have evolved which are customarily observed when attending this part of a club at this time of the week. They dictate a degree of formality in that members dress smartly. Older men wear trousers rather than jeans, a dress jacket and a shirt and tie; and women will dress up by paying more attention to detail of hair, jewellery, make-up and choice of clothes than they would normally. Younger members are less formal and are more fashionably casual in their attire, but retain the appearance of having made an effort to dress up to go out for the evening. Individuals in the concert room of a working men's club on a weekend night demonstrate a standard of dress and grooming that is intended to be obviously superior to their appearance on a mid-week night to a local club or pub.

Custom also dictates that couples remain as couples during the course of the evening in the concert room, although they may routinely meet with friends and sit together as a party for the night. Some members are recognised as having their tables 'reserved' in the concert room because of the regularity of their attendance. Being able to lay claim to a table, with the authority of having the table recognised by other members of the club as 'belonging' to the member(s) claiming it, is one expression of personal identity and social status within the

institutionalised norms of the club. On a number of occasions at different clubs I have witnessed people taking 'reserved' seats in the concert room and members arriving at 'their' seats and making it clear that they are 'their' seats. A number of strategies are used by members to regain their seats, such as direct requests for the occupants to move, or placing drinks on the table and standing over the seated interlopers until they feel sufficiently uncomfortable or intimidated to pick up their drinks and leave to sit somewhere else. In a club in Pelton, County Durham, one member approached a visitor sitting at a table and told him that he would have to move because the table 'belonged' to a member and he would want it when he came in.

Concert room as venue setting

Traditionally, live performances are staged in the concert room of a working men's club on at least one of the weekend nights. However, the majority of people in a concert room will not be there for the sole purpose of attending a performance; they will be there with family and friends as part of a usual pattern of their club attendance. Within the normal weekly cycle of working men's clubs, members routinely attend the concert room on a Saturday night and expect to see a live performance. This expectation is so fundamental that it is not uncommon for members to attend the concert room without knowing the nature of the performance that has been booked to appear. This scenario can arise because members attend concert rooms knowing there are other forms of entertainment to that of a live performance, which may be more of a priority to them. For example, some members may be more concerned to drink alcohol and enjoy the company of family and friends. Some may be in the concert room mainly for bingo as weekend cash prizes are higher than during the week. Some may be there dutifully as elected committee men or ex-officio stalwarts showing their credentials as actively committed members to the welfare of the club. Some may be there simply because they always are.

Considering the diversity of entertainment possibilities for members attending the concert room of a working men's club, it is the certainty with which each member knows that their preferred form of entertainment will be provided, which underpins a strict adherence to an entertainment format that is acknowledged as being a particular and defining feature of working men's clubs. This is to say that the same entertainment expectations are not universally present in the same regularised order in other Saturday night social spheres such as bars, public houses and night clubs. Williamson (1982) points out that historically clubs are 'strictly organised around the theme of entertainment' (p.109). The peculiarity of the regularisation of entertainment expectations in working men's clubs is a clear indication of the institutionalisation of the venue setting category to have initially established them and to consistently fulfil them.

In order to examine the institutional influence of a working men's club concert room in the production of (un)successful live performance humour, a comparative illustration will be drawn with another common venue for live performance humour: the theatre setting. This venue setting category is chosen for comparison because it too is a highly developed institutionalised setting from a series of historical and socio-cultural factors. Hence the comparison is to show how the influence of institutionalisation on a venue setting can vary and contribute to markedly different social contexts that have a significant bearing in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. The way in which the term theatre is used here, is to describe the distinctive features of a venue setting with a formal proscenium arch stage and definitive conventions appertaining to an admission paying audience, that Mangham and Overington (1987) acknowledge as vital to the individual's perception of their taking part in the experience of theatre (p.49). It is not used to describe the grandness of a particular venue setting in terms of reputation, interior design, large seating capacity, physical structure of a building, or being sufficiently well equipped to be able to stage a wide range of theatrical forms. This means that seaside piers can be considered as theatres, as can town/civic halls and arts centres.

Attending live performance humour in a theatre setting involves a number of significantly different factors compared to attending a performance in the concert room of a working men's club. For example, going to a theatre does not fall within the day to day routine of the majority of individuals who form an audience to a performance. Attendance at a theatre is a specific event that requires some degree of forward planning and organisation that will break the everyday routines of audience members. Tour dates and designated venues for particular performances must be discovered, and tickets must be bought some time in advance to ensure a (good) seat. Once purchased, tickets reserve a date in an individual's social calendar that is to be kept free from any other engagement. This is warranted by the relatively high price of theatre tickets and by the anticipation of seeing the work of a performer that initially inspired the purchase and the planning. Planning also includes travel arrangements being made to arrive at a particular theatre at a particular time, which may involve working out timetables to travel by public transport, researching a route to drive to an unfamiliar location, finding out about places to park a car and maybe arranging to leave work early or changing a work rota. The measure of planning and expense usually incurred in attending a theatre venue setting is put forward as being indicative of a knowledge of and a liking for, the work of an artiste and, therefore, some degree of artistic commitment to a performance. This is in stark contrast to the regular and routine attendance of members of an audience in a concert room venue setting in a working men's club.

The large majority of members of a concert room audience are not going out of their way to see a performance, rather they are simply going to a place they usually go which is a place that usually has an artiste performing. Here, live performance falls within the everyday experience of members' daily lives: it is an event which is ordinary for club members. Usually there is very little, if any, additional expense involved for club members and visitors to see live performances (of humour or any other kind), although a 'cover charge' of between 50p and £2 admission into the concert room may be imposed for some performances to help cover the cost of the booking fee.[11] There is no additional

planning involved for the majority of members of a concert room audience to watch a performance. They do not have to travel to an unfamiliar setting for the purpose of a performance because performers are brought to them in their club and performances are staged in a familiar space that members regard as being theirs. Whether disparate individuals travel to a specifically designated place to gather as an audience for the sole purpose of watching a performance, or whether performers must travel to a place that is frequented by an established membership who effectively constitute an audience every week in the same setting, will be shown to be an important consideration regarding the influence of institutional factors in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

Concert room audience

For most people who attend the concert room of a working men's club on a Saturday night, alcohol plays a central part in the evening's entertainment. Each concert room has a bar that can meet the needs of a capacity audience who regard drinking as an integral part of their pleasurable night out. It is common for concert room bars to remain open and active throughout the entire evening, without any concession being made to a performance taking place on stage.[12] The professional comedians I have interviewed, acknowledge that bar activity can amount to something that is eminently capable of undermining a performance. A comedian called Alan Fox (a MT1 performer), told of how the queue for the bar in one club concert room lined up directly in front of the stage while he was performing and the people in it chatted to each other as they slowly ambled past apparently totally oblivious of him. He said it seemed like most members of the audience were more concerned about the antics of those in the queue, than listening to anything he had to say. He admitted that he lost his act that night,

> 'I had to give it up as a bad job .... because there's nothing any comic can do in a situation like that - you've just lost them: They're full of hell wondering who's on the bar and where Billy is in the queue, and you're trying to make them laugh!'
>
> (See Appendix 2, note 4)

A MT2E performer called Bob Ritchie, went into great detail about the complexity of a part of his act that he had developed as a deliberate performance technique to, 'jack the audience up', in order to maximise the comic impact of one of his best jokes. His aim was to weave a comic subtext of sharp one-liners within a protracted joke that would prepare the audience for the intended 'big laugh' punchline. The comic impact depended entirely on the timing of the final punchline. He referred to one performance in which he believed he had worked this material particularly well and had successfully reached the point where everything was set up to deliver the clinching punchline climax, when, just before he could get the words out of his mouth, a member of the audience standing at the bar shouted boldly across the room to his friend to check if it was beefy or vinegar crisps he wanted. The attention of the audience was shattered. The comedian lost his hold on the audience to this comic impromptu and the intended big finish to the joke failed. Members of the audience were drawn to laugh at the witticisms being shouted out about the flavours of bags of crisps. The comedian made the full extent of his annoyance with this behaviour of the audience crystal clear to me. However, he resigned himself to the inevitability that 'these things happen' in club concert rooms; and he accepted the finality that comedians in working men's clubs will always be faced with similar spoiling incidents because of what he saw as 'the nature of the audience'.

All of the professional comedians I interviewed, who worked regularly in working men's clubs in the North-East of England, subscribed to the view that 'the nature of the (club) audience' is partly nurtured by the setting of the concert room. They agreed that the bar in a concert room produced a constant distraction with ringing tills, chinking glasses and the involuntary movement of audience members as bar customers during a performance. They maintained that these characteristic features, along with members drinking alcohol, have a significantly deteriorative effect on the condition of a concert room audience.

Alcohol consumption and its related activities are recognised as being capable of tipping the balance of power between audience and performer, away from the

performance of a comedian in the setting of a club concert room. This is evident in the way in which alcohol can be used by some members of a club audience to help them confidently engage with a comedian as a heckler. This behaviour is promoted by the use of alcohol because it functions to unpick the tightest social ties and free the ego by degrees to allow an individual to be less self-conscious while it lasts. This effect is called disinhibition,

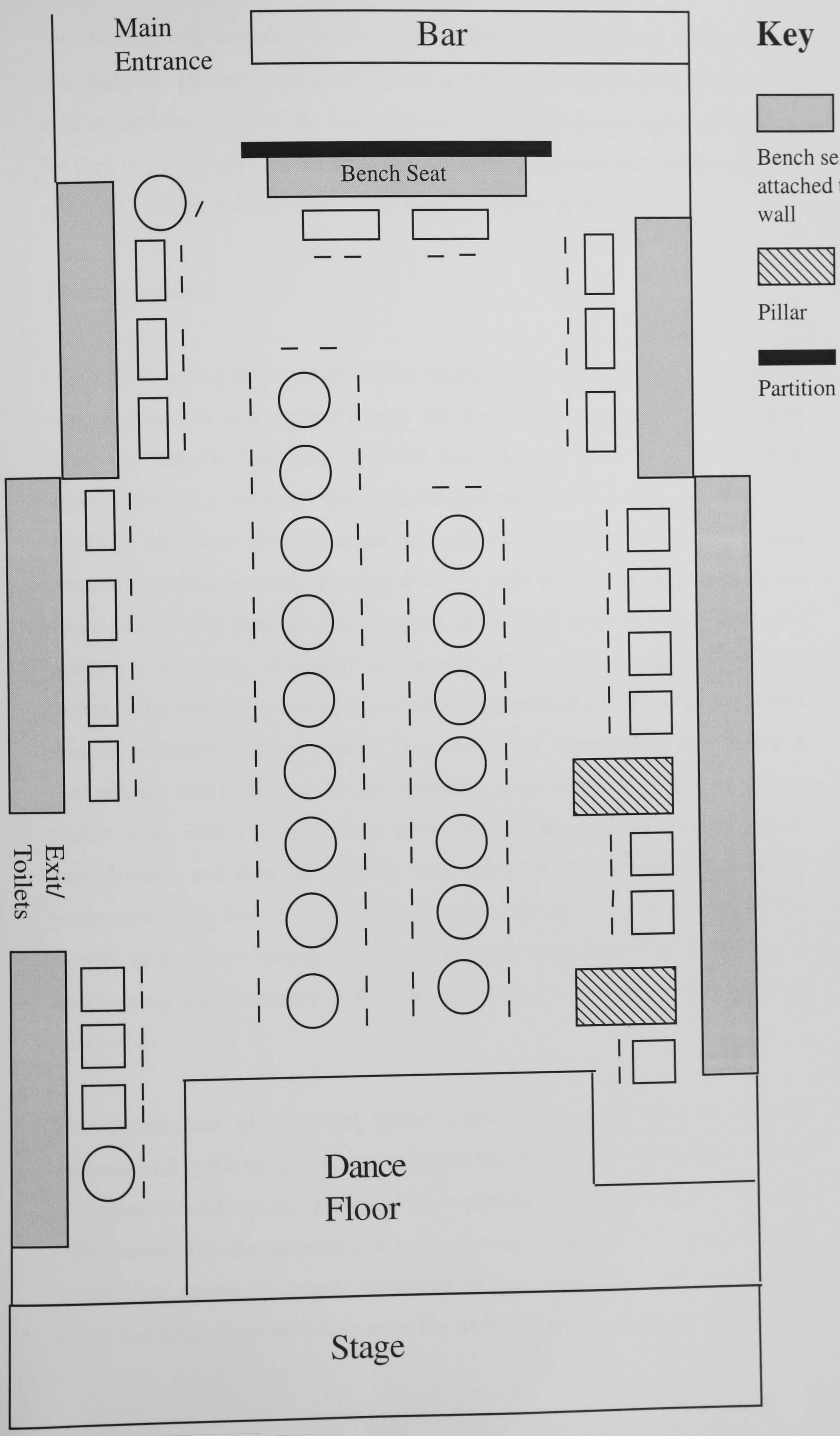
> ...and arises from the unrestrained activity of parts of the brain freed from the inhibitory control of other centres, and also very importantly the way the culture and the immediate environment suggests that an intoxicated person could actually behave.
> (The report of a special committee of The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1979, p.31)

Armitage (1987) sates that alcohol is recognised as making people feel more relaxed and more, 'confident and better prepared to join in a social occasion' (p.13). In a concert room it bolsters some individuals self-confidence to take advantage of an opportunity to gain attention for themselves, by distinguishing themselves as having the ability to challenge, if not outdo, a professional comedian with their heckling wit.

Some degree of heckling or audience involvement is a common feature of live performance humour in many venue settings and it is not possible to state that it will not occur in any one particular venue setting category. Indeed, heckling can provide grist for a competent comedian's mill. Bernard Manning for example (an ET3M performer), on stage in a theatre setting at the South Pier in Blackpool, was venomously accused by a particularly vitriolic heckler of being, 'a fat bastard'. Manning calmly turned to the heckler and said suavely: 'No son, that's fat *rich* bastard'. Professional comedians have a stock of well rehearsed 'spontaneous' retorts that can elevate their kudos with an audience, as they are seen to accentuate their professional credibility. On three separate occasions in different venue settings, I have observed heckling from people in audiences who subsequently sat with the artiste they had barracked, in an obviously friendly and familiar manner after the show and then leave with the artiste and drive away in the same vehicle. I am sure that on each occasion the hecklers were personal

acquaintances of the performers and were planted in the audience to provide stimulus material that was designed to allow humorously cutting replies to be made by the performers, in order to project an impression of their heightened professional competence. The most notable example involved a MT3E performer called Kay Ward, who was subjected to some particularly vile heckling abuse from two male members of the audience who were sitting together quite a distance from the stage. After the show, as the venue setting was closing, I saw that she was very friendly with the two men who were obviously personal acquaintances of hers. However, a level of authentic heckling can develop to a point of dysfunction, when the volume of vociferous audience participation effectively overwhelms a performer and causes the structure of an act to collapse. This does happen in club concert rooms because hecklers have an easier time in this setting than in other venue setting categories, such as theatre. One reason for this is the location of professional performers within the social context of the setting. Because it is extremely unlikely that a performer will be a member of the club they are booked to appear in, they have no legal right to enter the club. Professional artistes must, therefore, be 'signed in' to a club in the same manner as any other 'visitor'. Any artiste(s), irrespective of fame or reputation, wishing to perform in the concert room of a working men's club, can only do so, constitutionally, as an invited 'visitor' to the club. Hence the setting is such that members of a concert room audience, from their club membership and regular and often long-time attendance, are established in the venue setting in which artistes are invited into to perform. It is, therefore, a setting which characteristically gives rise to an audience with a commensurably developed sense of security which is conducive to hecklers' confidence to heckle. It is also easier for members of an audience to heckle a performer in a concert room setting than in a theatre setting, because the security afforded by a familiar setting, with the familiar faces of fellow club members present, enables some members to view a heckle as an extension of their own conversational entertainment, which is, importantly, supplemented by the consumption of alcohol.

One other contributory factor to shifting the balance of power away from performers in working men's clubs is the arrangement of seating in concert rooms. In contrast to the fixed rows of seats in a theatre setting, seating in a concert room is organised around tables because of the essential drinking requirement of (audience) members. Further, there is no set pattern to the arrangement of tables from one club to another, although rows perpendicular to the stage are quite common. The seating plan in fig.1 shows the layout of the concert room in the Medomsley Pretoria club, County Durham, as an example of typical audience seating in this venue setting. It shows that seating arrangements in club concert rooms invariably cause a sizeable proportion of an audience to have to turn their heads in order to watch a performance. This means it is easy for members of an audience in this setting to show they are not impressed with a performance by simply (re)turning their gaze away from the stage. Comedians are aware of this and aim to develop performances that can counteract the ease with which concert room audiences can effectively withdraw their attentive support from a performance. Many expressed the view that the success of a comedian in working men's clubs depends entirely on being able to grab the attention of an audience within the first minute of their act, 'If you don't get them then, right at the start, you might as well come off because you're not going to get them after that' (See Appendix 2, Note 5). Marti Caine, who worked as a MT1 (entertainer) performer in the clubs, believed performers had less than a minute, ... 'To survive a performer has to establish dominance within twenty seconds' (cited in Gray, 1994, p.138). Ned Kelly, a MT3E performer who works extensively in working men's clubs in the North-East of England, accomplishes this performative imperative of grabbing immediate audience attention by walking on stage stark naked, apart from a pair of bright red shoes, carrying his clothes over his shoulder on a coat hanger. His nudity has an uproarious impact on an audience and this works to focus the attention of everyone in the concert room on the stage. As the comic effect of his initial appearance subsides amidst shrieks of laughter and whistles, he stands in a full frontal pose looking a little bewildered. With expert timing he waits for the precise moment that he decides the audience is ready in eager anticipation to hear what he has to say, only then


Main Entrance
Bar
Bench Seat
Key
Bench seats attached to wall
Pillar
Partition
Exit/ Toilets
Dance Floor
Stage

does he languidly complain to the audience that he wasn't given much time to get changed. His next line is to tell the audience that he knows exactly what they're thinking: 'doesn't he look fucking stupid in them red shoes' (laughter). He then begins to get dressed on stage as he continues into the content material of his act with the full attention of the audience firmly secured.

Theatre audience

In a theatre setting there are individual social and physical factors that work to impose discipline and decorum upon members of an audience. It has been shown in chapters four and five that these factors relate to; the internal organisation of a theatre; the splendid grandeur and opulent decor of the building; and to cultural theatrical conventions. In combination these factors perpetrate passive attentive viewing from an audience to a performance in the venue setting of a theatre. For example, in contrast to the concert room of a working men's club, alcohol is not usually permitted in the auditorium of a theatre. The sale and consumption of alcohol is normally confined to a different area of a theatre and to a short time during an intermission and before a performance starts. During an intermission it is awkward for people to have to shuffle along rows of knees, make their way to a bar, wait to be served, have their drink(s) and then get back to their seats for the prompt restart of the performance they have travelled to the theatre especially to see. Consequently, alcohol in a theatre setting does not amount to something that is capable of undermining a performance in the way it is in the concert room of a working men's club.

The organisation of theatrical space augments a social distance between audience and performance, with performers situated behind a prominent lighted proscenium arch stage and presented to an audience sitting in the dark. Chaney (1993) notes that the darkening of a theatre auditorium during a performance, 'encouraged norms of orderly behaviour in that movement and conversation within the auditorium were incompatible with respectful attention' (p.53). The

requisite attentive viewing of a performance is further supplemented by the arrangement of seating into fixed rows in all parts of the auditorium, that all face the stage. Also, with the probability that people attending a theatre will have strangers sitting on either side of them and immediately around them, the potential for conversational distraction away from a performance is significantly reduced: 'Since inhibiting social forces are experienced as more confining in the context of strangers than in the context of friends' (Pollio, in McGhee and Goldstein, 1983, p.217). Chaney (1993) argues that the, 'social phenomenology of theatrical experience was further transformed' by 'The processes through which the theatre acquired institutional respectability', which are 'inseparably grounded in the articulation of a culture of respectability'. This had a marked effect on the 'disciplining of audience attention and respectful decorum' (pp.52-4). As a result of conventionalised institutional respectability and individual social and physical factors working to maintain disciplined audience behaviour, such as passive attentive viewing of performance, the propensity for performance challenging behaviour from an audience, such as heckling, in a theatre setting is reduced.

Concert room audience?

In comparison to a theatre venue setting, there is not the same substantive assurance afforded to the collective description of men and women as an audience (for live performance humour) in the venue setting of a working men's club concert room. The 'social phenomenology' of concert room experience suggests there is room to question whether those in attendance during a performance can be accurately described as an audience, if the description is to follow the same definitive criteria applied to a theatre audience. Where a theatre setting institutionally establishes collective norms of respectability, that inform individuals of their required adherence to conventional codes of disciplined behaviour which underpin the collective description of individuals who attend a theatre as an audience, the setting of the club concert room institutionally undermines a comparably substantive definition of an audience being made to

that of an audience in a theatre. It does so by creating conditions that are favourable to the development of an active audience, rather than those that impose a decorum that is necessary to the definition of an audience in a theatre.

Routine, frequent and ritualistic attendance in a club concert room, in conjunction with the divergent patterns of audience behaviour that are deemed acceptable in the venue setting, from their reflection of institutionally vouchsafed divergent entertainment opportunities, enables audience members to develop their own performative presentations of self in the setting (Goffman, 1959, pp.32-3). Regular attendance over a period of time allows personal identities to become known to others within a working men's club, and its concert room. As a result, it is acceptable for members of a concert room audience to talk to, comment on, or simply acknowledge others while a performance is in progress. The ensuing general chit chat is not conducive to a disciplined and attentive viewing of a performance. On a number of occasions I have had to concentrate on listening to a comedian because of members of an audience talking. To Chaney (1993), the general conduct of a concert room audience suggests a 'pre-theatricality' (p.51). This is to say, that without the discipline imposed by the social context of a theatre venue setting on individuals' behaviour and attention as an audience to a staged performance, the use of the term audience is weaker by definition when applied to a concert room setting. The point can, therefore, be made, that performers (of humour) in the concert room of a working men's club, perform to a weaker (less disciplined) audience than performers in a theatre setting, which can result in a more difficult task for performers to be successful in a concert room as a venue setting for live performance humour.

(Un)successful live performance concert room humour

Highly skilled and technically competent professional comedians, who have developed their performances to be successful with working men's club audiences, occasionally fail in this venue setting. It is extremely difficult to

explain exactly why essentially the same performance of a comedian will fail in one club when it is so often successful in other clubs in the same region.

The randomness of performative fallibility of comedians in working men's club concert rooms, gives a clear indication that attempting to provide a detailed analysis of each unsuccessful performance would not address the fundamental issue - that it is not feasible to identify a specific type of performance that is guaranteed to be successful with a concert room audience.[13] Some of the comedians I interviewed as part of my Master's thesis, who are successfully established in working men's clubs in the North-East of England and other regions of the UK, stated that in their experience North-East club audiences in particular had absolutely no regard for the fame, name or reputation of a comedian, or any other performer for that matter. The reasoning of the comedians was that North-East concert room audiences felt that they could demand a standard of comic performance, because they considered themselves to be well informed and critically discerning of such performances from having seen so many appear in clubs. This reasoning is evident in a typical statement given by a MT2E performer called Bob Ritchie,

> 'They really have seen the very best in the clubs up here and in fact I'd say they've been spoiled. They know what's what and they won't put up with rubbish'.
>
> (See Appendix 2, note 6)

The comedians' assessment of North-East club concert room audiences accredits them with a level of expertise to be able to apply a sharply focused and brutally meritocratic viewing of a comedian's work, which enables a performance to be judged and rejected if it is considered to be 'substandard'. The underlying theme of the comedians' assessment of hard (to please) working men's club audiences, is put forward here as being based on stereotypical images of North-East working men's club audiences. This is because the comedians do not adequately acknowledge the influence of the social context of the venue setting of a club concert room in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. The institutional factors associated with defining a weaker, less disciplined audience

than in a theatre setting, are significantly understated in order to allow for platitudinally familiar images of hard, critically demanding North-East regional working men's club audiences to be used superficially as a convenient form of reasoning. For example, a MT2C performer called Mike Elliott, told of how a group of about forty people on holiday in the Channel Isles., had seen him perform there three nights running in a cabaret style venue setting on the resort. He said they said they 'loved him' and 'begged him' to come and perform at their working men's club as soon as he could. Arrangements were duly made when they arrived back home and he was booked to appear in their club three weeks later,

> 'It was a disaster. I could see them all in the audience and there I am on stage at their request doing the self same material they loved in the Channel Islands: But it was as if I didn't exist. I did twenty minutes and came off'.
> (See Appendix 2, note 7)

The example shows the influence of the institutionalised social context of a working men's club concert room venue setting in the production of (un)successful live performance humour. It shows that the failure of a tried and tested competent professional comedian's performance routine was not as a result of a concert room audience diligently attentively viewing the performance - like discerning theatre critics - and then informatively disregarding it as substandard. This could not have been the basis of the performance failure, as a significant number of audience members had already seen it in the Cannel Isles. and reviewed it with high critical acclaim. The example also shows that the influence of a club concert room venue setting is universal rather than (North-East) regional, because the supposedly hard and critically demanding audience in the club being referred to by Mike Elliott is in Liverpool, some 200 miles south west of the clubs being referred to earlier by the professional comedians giving their assessment of club concert room performance failure.

Conclusion

The success of a comedian's performance is not to be viewed as a gamble each time he or she walks onto a stage in the concert room of a working men's club, but neither is it to be viewed as being guaranteed in this setting. Different types of performances, ranging from as dark a 'blue' as the civilised mind could imagine to risqué stand-up, from drag acts to impressionists and from character acts to compares, will be watched by concert room audiences and either enjoyed or rejected without preferential discrimination. The basic requirement of a concert room audience from live performance humour, is that performances should be funny and make them laugh.[14] A performance that fails to grab and keep hold of an audience's attention can not expect to experience a courteous tolerance from a concert room audience that is devoid of the disciplined respectful attention that is a characteristic of audiences in a theatre setting.

A callous disregard for unimpressive comic performance arises from two main characteristics of the concert room venue setting. First, the physical organisation of the setting is based around the central activity of drinking alcohol. Hence the arrangement of seating is around tables rather than being situated purposefully to direct audience attention to the stage as in a theatre setting. Seating in concert rooms enables individuals in an audience to easily detach themselves from a performance, by simply turning away from performer(s) on stage and directing their attention to companions seated with them at their table.

The second characteristic is the low investment a concert room audience places on performance to ensure they have a good night out. Live performance is incorporated into a weekly routine of weekend concert room audiences that are largely composed of club members; it is not usually the single or special reason for their attendance. Even when members are required to pay a cover charge to enter the concert room of a club because a particular comedian is performing, the artistic commitment of an audience to the performance is lessened because working men's clubs resolutely institute a range of divergent entertainment

possibilities in the concert room and the common perception of members is that professional performers are booked to supplement rather than replace them. Therefore, if a comedian does not successfully secure audience attention, there are other activities such as, prize money draws and raffles, drinking, socialising and bingo to entertain them. Some of the comedians I have interviewed complained that they had had performances interrupted by club committee members telling them to hurry up and get off the stage because the bingo was due to start. With such a low premium placed on live performance (humour) a concert room audience does not have a high price of disappointment to pay if a performance fails.

The chapter shows that the social context of a working men's club concert room, as an insitiutionalised venue setting for live performance humour, is significantly influenced by the interaction of social actors and component factors. Macro- and micro-levels of analysis are required to identify the interactive dynamics associated with the concert room and theatre settings, in order to demonstrate comparatively the complex construction of substantially different institutionalised venue setting categories. The comparison shows that the institutionalised conventions of a theatre setting work to establish a disciplined audience with an attentive commitment to a performance. The commitment is both artistic - in that a theatre audience is made up of individuals who have gone out of their way to make special arrangements to go to a place to see a performance; and financial - in the increased expense of travelling and the high price of tickets. Whereas, in a club concert room members of an audience are subject to institutional factors that conspire to reduce the level of commitment to a performance. Hence, a mainstream type performance in the concert room of a working men's club may find success more difficult to achieve than in a theatre setting. This view was clearly expressed by a MT1 performer called Bobby Pattinson,

> 'If you go to a working men's club .... and they're not listening, you don't die because you never begin to live'.
>
> (See Appendix 2, note 8)

The institutional factors associated with a venue setting for live performance humour must, therefore, be considered in order to provide a substantive account of the influence of the social context of a venue setting in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

Conclusion

Although the sociology of humour is not considered to be a large field of inquiry in terms of the number of sociologists working in it, it is diverse in terms of research interests and it is eminently eclectic (Zidjerveld, 1983; Mulkay, 1988; Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988; Palmer, 1994). Consequently, it was anticipated that there would be room for criticism from sociologists of humour who feel that important areas of humour research could have or should have been developed in the thesis. The basis of my defence against such potential criticism, is that the research for the thesis required discipline and direction in order to maintain a concentrated address to the specific area of humour research identified in the title. Hence, the thesis is not a study of joke theory, it is not a study of humour theory, it is not a study of laughter, or audience research, it is not a study of comedians or the technical detail of performance, it is not a study of the social function(s) of humour, or joking relationships, or the politics of humour, or the mass production of humour, or anything other than what is stated in the title.

While research has been carried out into specific areas of live performance humour, such as the affects of proximity of seating, size of (audience) group, presence of women, and comedians, for example, which has demonstrated relevant issues in the production of humour and laughter by performers (that have been referred to in the thesis), I am not aware of an individual study that aims to provide the same complete address to the area of (un)successful live performance humour that this thesis aims to. Live performance humour is an area that demands to be considered as social practice from the immediate location of live performance as an exchange of meanings with a particular audience in a particular place at a particular time in a particular social context. Therefore, following the work of English (1994), who called for, 'humour to be studied as social practice - as 'whole scenes and systems of symbolic exchange' - rather than simply as a series of enunciations: that is, jokes' (cited in Paton, Powell and Wagg, (eds.) 1996, p.2), it is identified as an area that is relatively

under-researched. Although since English's call there has been a response from sociologists who have endeavoured to relate jokes to their social context (Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.), 1996), this thesis concentrates upon a specific notion of social context that applies directly to venue settings and a particular form of humour, namely, formalised live performance humour which takes place in venue setting social contexts rather than informal (non-performance) humour that relates 'jokes to their social context, whether at the micro-social level of conversation or at the macro-social level of class, gender and ethnic power relations' (Paton, Powell and Wagg, (eds.) 1996, p.2). The research for this thesis does not work with what Giddens identifies as the dualism which is represented in micro- and macro-level conceptions of social research. It is stated in the introduction to the thesis that the theoretical base of the work accepts Giddens' fundamental proposition of the duality of structure as social practice. This is developed to establish the research as a study based on linkage of micro- and macro-levels of analysis of live performance humour as social practice, which is not a developed area of humour research. Thus an aim of the thesis is to develop research into a comparatively new area of sociological inquiry in order to provide an original contribution to knowledge in the field of humour studies in the discipline of Sociology.

The aim of this concluding chapter is to substantiate the research findings and the determinacy of the explanations presented in the thesis, by using an example of successful live performance humour to demonstrate their practicability. The chapter will show how the interaction of a particular combination of non-performance (physical, social and cultural) factors associated with working men's club venue settings and their live audiences in the North-East of England, with performance factors such as content, style, physical and biographical detail, can produce an extraordinarily high level of success. Hence, although chapter six showed the working men's club to be a venue setting category with characteristic combinations of factors that can make it difficult for live performance humour to succeed, this chapter will show the same factors to be vital to the success of the performer who has been chosen to serve as an

example. The work in the chapter is to establish an exemplar of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice, in order to illustrate how a heightened and prolonged level of success of live performance humour, which can not be explained substantively solely by the performance skills of a competent performer, can exist. The chapter will utilise linkage of micro- and macro-levels of analysis of the example performer to establish the adequacy and completeness of a sociological explanation of the production of (un)successful live performance humour as a complex social practice.

The performer

The example performer is highly successful in the working men's clubs of the North-East of England. He has achieved a level of success that can be gauged initially by the remarkable capacity of the jokes used in his performances to defy the depreciation curve of jokes.[1] Instead of his jokes becoming less funny the more times people hear them, they remain as vibrant and as funny, irrespective of the number of times individual members of his audience hear them. Indeed, it is common for members of this performer's audience to have heard the joking content of his performance so many times, that they are able to routinely recite the jokes themselves. Nevertheless, despite this familiarity with the work of the performer, the demand for his work continues.[2] The performer is called Bobby Thompson.

Bobby Thompson died in April 1988 aged 76. The greater part of his work as a professional MT1 'character act' performer was carried out in the working men's clubs in the North-East of England. Yet, despite his immense popularity with North-Eastern club audiences, he was never to make the big-time and become a household name nationally as a professional comedian. It has been suggested by a number of his contemporaries that this was partly as a result of the limited opportunities offered to Thompson to perform to a wider audience, on television for example, because his heavy regional (Geordie) dialect was deemed to be virtually unintelligible outside of the North-East, and that any change to his

speech would have ruined his performances as the essential meter and timing would have been lost.[3] Thompson's restricted opportunities to succeed with a nation-wide television audience were also thought to stem from his comic material being considered to be too highly regionally stylised and, therefore, not a viable comic proposition beyond working men's club audiences in the North-East. However, some of his peers have argued that his restricted access to a nation-wide audience was more a direct result of his lifestyle and personality, which lacked the discipline to support the level of professionalism required from a performer in broadcast media. In addition to this, some observers have commented that he was satisfied with the realisation that he controlled a winning combination of factors that assured his successfulness as a comedian in the clubs in the North-East. It could, therefore, be argued that this realisation gave a clear indication of his professionalism in that he knew how to remain successful as a comic performer. Irrespective of which of these theories is closer to the truth, the essential point is that Thompson was exceptionally successful in a particular category of venue setting in a particular geographical region of the UK. It is because of this and his corresponding anonymity outside of the region, that he can be used as a substantive example of how the level of success of live performance humour depends upon more than the skills of a highly competent performer.

The structure of Thompson's performance in working men's clubs did not change during the period of his unrivalled comic popularity in the North-East, from the mid-1970's until his death. It involved two 35-40 minute routines, one called the 'Little Waster' and the other was called, 'Private Thompson'. He would start with the 'Little Waster' and then leave the stage for about 40 minutes, while other club entertainment activities such as bingo and raffle draws were undertaken, and then return to the stage as 'Private Thompson'. Consequently, his localised regional audience became very familiar with the content material of his two-part performance, yet he was able to attract people to see him do the same routines on numerous different occasions and still find the performances funny. In 1978 Thompson released an LP record of the two

routines and it sold over 120,000 copies in the first year of its release to be the best selling record of the year in the North-East; beating the chart topping musical LP of the film 'Grease'.[4] Six years later he enjoyed the same level of commercial success when a video of the same two routines was released. Today people in the North-East still recite his jokes and one-liners and laugh at them - and still watch and listen to his Little Waster and Private Thompson recordings, as well as attend shows such as Peter Peverley's that pay tribute to 'the comedy legend Bobby Thompson', 'the North-East's favourite comedian'.[5]

This chapter aims to explain how Bobby Thompson was able to reach such a reverential level of unqualified comic success with his regional audience, despite the putative comic limitations of a complete and conspicuous repetition of well worn comic material. Indeed, his joking material was the same as that used by many other comedians throughout the UK, which was based upon general themes associated with stereotypical perceptions of working class life. It also formed the joking content of performances for a number of comedians working successfully to audiences in working men's clubs in the North-East.[6] This invites the question of how was Thompson able to rise to such an eminent position above his accomplished and successful contemporary professional comedians in the North-East clubs, when his performances were based on the same joking content themes as theirs? In order to account for his success it is necessary to consider the way in which Thompson was able to encapsulate an effective combination of individual physical and social factors that have been identified in this thesis as significant in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

Authentication

It has been mentioned that a number of comedians working regularly and successfully in the working men's clubs in the North-East, used the same kind of content material in their performances as Thompson; and that it is material used in live performance humour in any area of the country and on nation-wide

broadcast media. Indeed, it is as universal as the class structure which serves as its referent. However, Thompson was able to use this generalised joking material in a way that made it particularly effective with his regional audience and authentication is put forward as a vital feature of his particular effectiveness. This is to say that Thompson was able to authenticate a fit between the general joking material and the specific stage persona being presented to a North-East regional audience. This is to accept Davis's definition of authenticity,

> We assess the authenticity of actors' identity by evaluating the *relation between* their *external and internal aspects*, by judging whether their presented outer identity reflects their inner self accurately: "*being* what they claim to be."
>
> (Davis, 1993, p.251)

But whereas Davis applies this definition to his claim that 'social humour ridicules those who lack authenticity' insofar as 'Humour reveals the discrepancy between .... inner self and outer identity claims - in short, inauthenticity'(p.251), it is used here to emphasise the specific claim that the potential successfulness of joking material used in live performance humour is increased when there is coherence, rather than discrepancy, between inner and outer identity claims: *seeming* to be on stage what they present themselves to be. In other words, authentication refers directly to performance and in particular, the way a performer is able to fully utilise joking material in terms of both content and style features of performance. Whether it is a stand-up 'mainstream' comedian telling jokes that are pilloried as sexist, racist, or homophobic, or a politically correct 'alternative' comedian referring to women, ethnic groups or gays, there is a stylistic management of a performance in terms of the projected image, appearance and language (vocabulary, accent, idiom, reference) of the performer that can authenticate a successful humorous performance of content material.

Authentication does not refer directly to an audience. It does not make any statement about an authenticated performance being readily accepted as humorously successful by an audience. Authentication is used as a term to indicate performative potential, in that a performer who can command a significant combination of individual physical and social factors, that contribute

to an authentic stylistic management of content material, is ideally positioned to fully exploit the humorous capabilities of the content material. Bobby Thompson was undoubtedly perfectly able to command a particularly effective combination of component factors to authenticate the content material of his performances.

Some of these factors are dependent upon the physical attributes of the performer, but this does not mean that they require the referent of a reality outside of the performance. However, some aspects of some performances appear to suggest such a reference because of their physical nature. Jo Brand's fatness, for example, allows her to premise a great deal of her (CT3M) joking material on gluttony and other eating disorders that mark the plight of the fat woman in a slim female gender-stereotype society. Schaeffer (1981) argues that an empathetic understanding is seen to be a prerequisite to laughter (p.80) and Brand's material would not realise its full comic potential if it were performed by a slim comedienne who could not authenticate such empathy. However, to claim that Brand's material develops an empathetic understanding because it corresponds to either a reality of fat women in Britain, or her own reality beyond her performance, is as tenuous as claiming that the physical reality of an Irish accent used to authenticate a first-person narrative style for a performer like Jimmy Cricket (a MT1 'character act') doing 'Irish' jokes, corresponds to a reality of Irish people being stupid, or the reality of Jimmy Cricket being stupid beyond the context of his performance. The reality of fatness or an Irish accent authenticates the performance in a way that enables the content material to be more securely contained within a humorous context. The more a performer can establish their joking material as vital and totally comprehensible within the controlled reality of the performance, the greater the potential for humorous effect than if it were to be used by another comedian who could not exercise this control.

The authenticated control of performative reality can therefore be used to desensitise content material that can carry a high propensity to offend if it is not

effectively contained within the joking parameters of a performance. For example, a performance utilising joking material based on the physical effects of cerebral palsy will not have the same level of assurance with an audience to find it funny, as when the performer is able to authenticate the material as a victim of the disease, as Steady Eddy (an ET1 performer) does. Similarly, it is less likely that content material will be charged as sexist when it is given by a female performer, or homophobic from a gay performer (Gray, 1994, p.136). However, the physical reality of factors such as sex, obesity or spastic paralysis involved in the authentication of content material, refer only to the manner in which they facilitate the presentation of references being humorously exploited during the course of a performance. Their physicality is used substantively to empirically support the context in which references are identified as humorous.

In short, authentication refers to the way in which the style of the performer develops a sense of reality that applies only to the context of the performance itself; to contain content material within a humorous context. Schaeffer (1981) argues that as long as an audience is convinced that the material relates to this context, then it will not be perceived as insensitive to their reality. He claims it is this context, which is created by the style of the comedian, that prevents 'hyperbolically painful' content material from becoming too real.

> The result is that we are led away from the sad contents of reality towards a sympathetic appreciation of the style which contains them. There occurs a progression from real to ideal, from fact to fiction, from content to context. This progress releases reality's painful grasp upon our hearts and frees us to humorously appreciate the artful arrangement rather than the content of painful material.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.62)

The physical attributes used by performers in performance to help to develop a sense of reality that pertains only to the context of the performance, effectively reduces the likelihood of joking material overstepping the boundaries of the humorous context to offend the sensibilities of those watching the performance. However, chapter two shows that the content material of some performances can be pushed beyond the stylistic contextualisation of the type of performance to

overstep the boundaries of humorous acceptability. Despite an obvious ability to authenticate their performances to a wide audience, as measured by commercial success and heightened comic reputation, authentication can not relieve a performer from having to make the final judgement as to the acceptability of elements of joking content within a particular performance to a particular audience in a particular venue setting at a particular time. Such a miscalculation unmistakably represents a failure on the part of a performer, in that material that is prone to being seen as too real leaves it open to offend and insult members of an audience. Even 'extreme' type performers such as Bernard Manning, Andrew 'The Dice Man' Gray or Roy 'Chubby' Brown, who have established their reputations as insulting and bluntly uncompromising and indiscriminate with the subjects they choose to vilify (including individual members of their audiences) - and who are able to hold some exceptionally vile material in a humorous context, can fail with a misjudged reference that simply oversteps the humorous context of the performance.[7]

It is to reduce the high cost of such a lapse from the humorous context of a performance, that authentication of content material is put forward as particularly advantageous to any type of performer in the form of live performance humour. Hence, in order to assess the extent to which authentication can contribute to the success of a performance, it is necessary to examine a performance that has proved to be inordinately successful in consistently making people laugh; namely, the work of Bobby Thompson.

Just as stand-up performers such as Steady Eddy (an ET1 victim of Cerebral palsy), Gary Skyner (an ET1 Thalidomide victim) and Jo Brand (a CT3M fat woman) use joking references that are totally dependent upon their immediately identified physical attributes, the authentication of content material used in Thompson's performances is heavily reliant upon observable physical aspects of his performance. While there are significant physical attributes to Thompson's person that work to authenticate his performances, which will be discussed shortly, there is a difference between Thompson and the other performers

mentioned, in that he utilises costume as a prop (a physical property) to stylistically enhance the authentication of the text of his performances. He used costume to represent the identity of his performance 'character' at different times in the character's life history, as depicted in two separate routines that made up the complete performance of his booking.[8] The use of costume is well established in comedy. Charney (1978) maintains,

> Comedy is so fastidious about costume because, in such a highly conventional form, it is one of the chief means of characterization. The characters are externally defined by occupation, social class, wealth (or absence of it), and even mood and temperament.

He goes on:

> Since character is so externally defined in comedy, the costumes provide the basis for specific and exact interpretations, which may also draw on the special associations of a bygone historical period.
>
> (Charney, 1978, pp. 54-5)

The two costumes used by Thompson for each of his routines were designed specifically to effectively visually represent the individual he purports to be as the essential character of both parts of the whole performance. In both of the routines Thompson's costumes function as a form of wit (Charney, 1978, p.54). They are exaggeratedly ill-fitting and shabby and emphasise the slight physical stature of ('little Bobby') Thompson by being so baggy. They also signify the impoverished working class identity of the character in performance. The 'external definition' of factors of physical size of the individual and social class are used just as extensively as humorous references throughout both of the routines, as cerebral palsy is in Steady Eddy's performances and fatness in Jo Brand's performances. The obvious difference is that neither cerebral palsy or fatness are themselves a form of wit and are, therefore, more dependent upon the authentication of the performer than a ubiquitous costume presentation of conventional 'low character' comedy (Charney, 1978 pp. 51-2; Holland, 1982, p.17; Purdie, 1993, ch.3; Palmer, 1994, ch.10).

To suggest there is a significant difference in the level of authentication between performances based on the use of costume compared to those based on the actual physical condition of the performer, may be overstated by concentrating on restrictive practicalities: that a competent performer can don a costume and deliver content material is surely more feasible than pretending to be the victim of cerebral palsy. If a performance was ultimately dependent upon costume then this would secure the grounds for a case to be made that such a performance was less authenticated. This case could not be made with regard to Thompson, as his performances were not ultimately dependent upon the use of costume. His use of costume was for it to function as an embellishment to stylistically enhance rather than determine the humour of his performances. But authentication does by definition imply restriction. The point is to regard this restriction as the result of the complete constituent factors that produce the authenticated performance, rather than as the result of the degree to which the empirical reality a single visual expedient can act to practically debar other performers. Each authenticated performance is just as restrictive to other performers as each rely on the cognizable and impelling coherence in the personal identity of the performer *seeming* to be what they present themselves to be, and whether disabled, fat, Black, gay, female or dressed in costume, these external signs are significant only because they ostensively define an identity within the framework of a humorous performance (Charney, 1978, p.53).

Apart from his use of costume, Thompson was able to call into effect a number of other significant physical factors that worked to authenticate his performances. With his life's work as a comedian being based emphatically in the North-East of England and in the working men's clubs of the region particularly, his genuine regional accent and consummate control of dialect words, colloquialisms, idiomatic references and syntactic peculiarity assigned to the naturalistic linguistic expression of the region's 'Geordie' vernacular, is acknowledged as a particularly important physical attribute.[9] Also his small physical stature in terms of height and build (5`3`` tall and about 9st), and his old age during the period of his peak popularity from the mid-1970's until his death

in 1988, are recognised as equally important factors contributing to the successfulness of his work. In order to appreciate the significance of these physical attributes it is necessary to consider the detail of both the form and the content of Thompson's performances. This will be done on two levels. First, the precise performative association between content material and the physical attributes mentioned above, will be shown to secure the identity of the 'character' on stage (upon which the humour of the performance is based) by authenticating the relationship between the content material and its stylistic presentation as coherent and consistent with the identity of the character. The second level is an analysis of how Thompson's performance works by looking at the wider cultural context of the performance. This could be referred to as the macro-level. However, because of the aim of this research to put forward explanations based on linkage between micro- and macro-levels, rather than attempting to systematically distinguish between two different levels of analysis: between micro-level explanations of the action of subjects and macro-level explanations of the structures in which actions take place, the preferred reference is to look at what Bennett (1990) describes as the 'outer frame' of performance which, 'contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event' (p.149). The aim of this is to show how Thompson was able to tap into and exploit familiar structures of meaning that his regional working men's club audience readily associated with the imagery of the North-East of England.[10]

> The spectator comes to the theatre as a member of an already-constituted interpretative community and also brings a horizon of expectations ... - or. as Herbert Blau describes it: 'An audience without a history is not an audience' (1987: 34).
>
> (Bennett, 1990, p.149)

The character of the performance

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Thompson's stage act was split into two routines, each with its own name and costume. The first routine was called the 'Little Waster', and for this he wore a comically shabby costume made

up of a dirty old cloth cap, an oversized raggy woolly jumper and a pair of tattered baggy britches. He looked like a comic stereotype of a vagabond from an earlier (pre-world war II) period of economic depression. In keeping with the symbolism of the costume, the content material of the 'Little Waster' routine was to revolve around central themes associated with the material hardship the character endured, such as poverty, dole and debt and the domestic entanglements such a lifestyle was to create for him, namely a constant battle of wits with his large overbearing wife, nosy neighbours and an interfering mother-in-law. The 'Little Waster' identity is very close to the work-shy and wily Andy Capp cartoon character created by Reg Smythe and indeed, some informed commentators believe that the North-Easterner Smythe based his cartoon character on Thompson's 'Little Waster' character (See Appendix 2, note 9). At the end of the 'Little Waster' routine Thompson would leave the stage for an interval of about 40 minutes while other club entertainment activities, such as bingo and raffle draws would take place and return dressed in the costume of a British army private in the Second World War for his second 'Private Thompson' routine. Again, the costume is visually comical in that it is an exaggeratedly ill-fitting and tatty tunic. However, both the costume and the content material make it readily apparent to an audience that it is the same 'Little Waster' character with the same world view, only in a conscripted army predicament. This audience recognition is extremely important to the success of the 'Private Thompson' routine, as it is the audience's established familiarity with the identity of the 'Little Waster' character that enables the essential joking material to be derived from references based on that knowledge and which would otherwise be totally nonsensical.

The 'Little Waster' is a likeable rogue whose roguery has developed largely as a response to the unfavourable material conditions of his working class existence. He makes sure everyone understands he is a victim of these conditions by the references he makes to his impoverished and debt-ridden lifestyle. But he is resilient and will not be beaten. When he hears a debt collector knocking frantically on the front door of his house, his motto is to, 'let them knock - the

paint will last longer than the skin'. He makes sure everyone understands he is a victim of the class system by using his mocking 'posh' voice to antagonise and debunk his 'stuck-up' social superiors. A pretentious neighbour, for example, bragging about her furniture going back to Queen Anne in 1700 is ridiculed with the reply that his furniture goes back to the Co-op [11] on Monday. He is subject to the harsh conditions of manual (un)employment, yet bucks the system so that he, as a work-shy employee at best, can have time off work to drink beer in the working men's club. He tells his audience how he could be off work or late for his shift because he couldn't see due to fog. He never has any money but always has the guile to obtain beer and can easily fiddle a claim from the Social Security when needs be: 'The dole is my shepherd I shall not work'.

The 'Little Waster' is a victim of the capitalist system, but he is not a looser because he is sharp-witted and is able to manipulate the system to meet his own goals as a social survivor. This is evident throughout both performance routines and is confirmed when the 'Little Waster' is forced to demonstrate his social acumen when he is conscripted into the army for his 'Private Thompson' routine. For this routine to work effectively as successful live performance humour, his audience had to be aware that it was the same 'Little Waster' character that had been conscripted. Consequently Thompson left nothing to chance and at the start of the routine would refer directly to the 'Little Waster's' domestic life prior to 'his letter from Chamberlain'. He also used every opportunity to reaffirm this identity during the course of the routine, as he was fully aware that the humorous techniques he used were ultimately dependent upon the character. Using an autobiographical narrative form, for example, strengthened the identity of the character to enable him to use the technique of incongruity with great effect: it was to provide an audience with the knowledge to see the strain of plausibility that Palmer (1987) argues provides the balance to prevent the joking content of an act becoming excessively implausible and 'merely silly' (p.136).

> we could frame a general notion of plausibility in which character would be responsible for actions - as Hugo von Hofmannsthal said, 'Character is destiny' - and therefore the source of plausibility.
>
> (Palmer, 1987, p.116)

Early in the 'Private Thompson' routine, for example, Thompson makes sure that his audience recognise his appearance in an army uniform as representing a particular episode in his (the 'Little Waster's') life. He confirms this identity with constant references to 'Little Waster' characteristics and by adopting a tone of reminiscence as he begins to recount how in 1939, as secretary of the street committee, ('I wanted to be treasurer but they all knew me') he had to phone Neville Chamberlain to find out how things stood with Germany.

'So a gives Neville a ring and his missus, Hannah, answers [Thompson puts on his posh voice to do an impersonation of Hannah putting on her posh voice]

"Halloo wha's speaking?"

"It's little Bobby Thompson". [Hannah immediately drops her posh voice]

"Oh hello Bob, could you just hang on a minute I've got a pan of chips on". She comes back on the phone and says: "What can I do for ya Bobby?"

"Is Neville in?"

"You've just missed him Bob, he's away for coal."

"He must've heard the tide was out."

"No it was the only day he could borrow the bike."

And so the content material goes on. The obvious ludicrous incongruity works on different levels to establish the identity of the character of the performance; each providing a different opportunity for potentially humorous interpretations to be made by members of an audience. Initially, a tatty work-shy 'Little Waster' going to telephone the British prime minister to enquire about affairs of state. The implausibility of this action contains within it the 'slender thread' of plausibility predicated upon the identity of the character, in that such an action will have a consequence and this is enough to provide the balance needed to generate subsequent levels of incongruity. A second level derives from the incongruity of the 'Little Waster' already being on friendly terms with 'Neville and his wife Hannah'; and a third level is the reversal of expectations to show the Chamberlain's having a lifestyle like that of the 'Little Waster's'. Schaeffer describes how incongruity works.

> That is, when we notice something as incongruous, we also simultaneously understand it to be in some minor way congruous. Our mental task is to find this slender element of congruity amid the predominating elements of incongruity.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.9)

The point Schaeffer makes is that incongruity rests on a 'slender thread' that ties the two elements in a juxtaposition and associates the incongruous objects and that this is not the product of rational logic. Not all incongruity is humorous in nature and Schaeffer claims that a humorous association has more to do with the context in which the signification attached to the two incongruous elements ('poles') takes place, rather than any logical or conscious effort to appreciate the incongruity. Within the ludicrous context of Thompson's performance it is the strong identity of the 'Little Waster' character that provides one (congruous) 'pole' with an attachment of signifiers that can be set against a second 'pole' of associations to generate incongruity in a style that is regarded by some theorists to give rise to humour (Suls, 1972; Rothbart, 1976; Schaeffer, 1981; Davis, 1993; Palmer, 1994). Schaeffer defines incongruity as 'a contrast that triggers a significantly hidden meaning' (1981, p.10), and in the field of the comic he argues that ludicrous incongruities have the potential to inspire a wider and deeper range of association.

> It should be clear that the more associations that accrue around and down from each pole of the incongruity, the more possibilities exist for entirely personal, idiosyncratic significance's or linkages between the two poles. And ludicrous incongruity initiates the widest possible range of idiosyncratic signification ... [and] ... tend positively to encourage the widest and deepest possible idiosyncratic interpretation.
>
> (Schaeffer, 1981, p.13)

By working constantly within a juxtaposition between the identity of the 'Little Waster' character and its location within circumstances and events that were patently incongruous with the character, Thompson was able to expand his joking material to a more surreal level that widened the range of idiosyncratic signification and interpretation. For example, the 'Little Waster' recalls how it was he who had to phone Chamberlain in the first place following a chance meeting with Adolf Hitler in his local fish and chip shop. Again, the 'Little Waster' is on friendly terms with 'Adolf', and again, Hitler (like Chamberlain) is

shown to have a similar lifestyle to the 'Little Waster'. Indeed, this performance technique, which develops humour from incongruencies predicated upon the identity of the Little Waster character, was also used repeatedly throughout the 'Private Thompson' routine with great effect. It formed the basis of a particularly successful part of the routine that involved 'Private Thompson' travelling to London to meet with Field-Marshal Montgomery who was to take him to Buckingham Palace to see King George. An often quoted one-liner by North-Easterners familiar with his work, came from the point in the routine where Montgomery is walking alongside Thompson as they cross the courtyard of Buckingham Palace,

> 'Lizzy was on the balcony - she was hanging the washing out - and I could see her looking at us [with a puzzled expression] to see who was coming in, and I heard her say, "Who's that with little Bobby?"'
>
> (See Appendix 2, Note 10)

Many stand-up performers adopt an autobiographical form during at least part of their performances, as it extends the scope of material that can be used by the artiste, by introducing different situations and experiences from different periods of the performer's life, or indeed the life of the character of the performance. For most 'mainstream' type performers this is usually 'at the minimum level of comic narrative' as it is no more than a device to introduce a 'string of disconnected jokes' (Palmer, 1987, p.152). However, with Thompson all of the content material of both of his routines was presented as an autobiographical narrative, which has the narrative complexity of a monologue where, 'the typical form of narrative organisation ... is comic articulation, in which each gag launches the next' (Ibid, p.152). But there is more to Thompson's narrative than the sequential launching of gags and jokes. He based all of his joking material, which he mostly wrote himself, on the specific life experiences of a character that his audience recognised as familiar in terms of stereotypical images associated with the condition of the working class in the North-East of England.

> Because it is intrinsic to 'joke-work', to use Freud's term, to evoke some discourse or discourses, it necessarily follows that if a series of jokes or sketches is based around a certain limited range of discourses and ways of disrupting them, then these jokes or sketches will have a common identity, which if pursued consistently will become the basis of the identity of a show or a comedian.
>
> (Palmer, 1987, p.156)

Thompson's joking references to social discourses which his regional audience accepted as being particular to a North-East regional 'Geordie' stereotype, worked effectively to secure the identity of the 'Little Waster' character of his performances. It was secured further by Thompson engaging in these discourses with the use of recollected personal experiences from the character, to develop a realist narrative performance style by using an autobiographical form to sharpen the connotative efficiency of the narrative discourse of the act. This was developed on two levels: first, by building a characterisation upon his audience's existing knowledge of the 'Geordie' imagery of the North-East region and secondly, by using his real name to refer to himself as the character of the 'Little Waster' and 'Private Thompson' routines. By using his real name in performance, Thompson was able to provide an inter-textual plausibility from his non-performance identity that allowed him to utilise what Barthes (1973) calls 'cultural' and 'symbolic' codes (pp. 97-8) to increase the strength of the identity of his stage character. This is because the highly significant biographical factor involved in the authentication of his work enabled him to develop various effective codes of signification, within the ludicrous context of performance, such as realism, which was enhanced by an existing stock of non-performance knowledge that his audience had of Thompson - they knew that he really had lived through the hard times he talked about on stage.

> 'He can get away with it because he knows what he's talking about - its not pretend with him.'
>
> (See Appendix 2, Note 11)

The effectiveness of these codes will be discussed shortly in order to show how the construction of the 'Little Waster' character in performance was protected from a potential for the signification to fail; a failure that would allow an

audience to perceive the 'Little Waster' as a basically unpleasant and derogatory regional stereotype being perpetrated for financial gain by a professional comedian. As a predicate to the discussion, the significance of Thompson's real life history must be considered.

The biographical factor

Thompson was born in New Penshaw, County Durham, in November 1911 and lived all his life in the North-East of England. Both of his parents died when he was very young and he was brought up by his elder sister, Rosina. He left Fatfield school, near Washington, County Durham, at the age of 14 and went straight to work as a coal miner. He worked most of his time as a miner at North Biddick colliery and had experienced periods of unemployment and poverty through the depression of the 1920's and 30's that had caused him to have to rake the slag heaps by hand to find bits of coal to sell. The publicity surrounding Thompson made this biographical detail common knowledge to members of his audience. They knew that he had actually been through the hard times that underpinned both the central content themes and the style of his performances. However, the biographical authority of Thompson's 'hard times' performance theme also existed for many other comedians working in the working men's clubs of the North-East at the time of Thompson (and since) who did (and do) utilise similar joking material.[12]

A significant point of difference between Thompson and the other comedians is that Thompson's biography was more authoritative than the others because it remained contemporaneous. Other performers who claimed to vouchsafe the humorous credibility of their 'hard times' material from their experiential knowledge, became perceptibly more distanced from it as their performative success increased. This is to say that the regional audience recognised their reputation as a successful professional comedian in terms of the corollary of personal (material) success. This association was judged to stand on the basis of nothing being made publicly known to audiences about the private lifestyles of

the performers to challenge it. In marked contrast, Thompson was never far away from the type of publicity that showed him to have continually experienced the kind of troubles in his real life, that his 'Little Waster' character recounted on stage, such as unpleasant work, low pay, unemployment and being hounded by debt collectors. His audiences knew he had been sacked from a television show in the 1950's, reputedly because of his heavy drinking, when he was set to enhance his comic reputation.[13] They knew of his reputation for unreliability around the thriving and competitive club circuit of North-East in the 1960's, that resulted in him working irregularly for small fees to pay for his drinking, cigarettes, gambling and general fecklessness. (At this time Thompson would often disappoint audiences when he simply would not turn up for a booking at a club, usually because he had been offered more money to appear somewhere else.) His ongoing and public hassles with the Inland Revenue for non-payment of income tax were common knowledge to his regional audience. Right up until his death he publicly stated that he regarded the taxman as a debt collector, and just like the 'Little Waster' he refused to pay up. Two years before his death he was declared bankrupt facing a tax bill of £137,000, and did not repay a penny of it. He even wanted the epitaph on his gravestone to read, 'Pay nowt' (Penfold, 1988).

At the time of the peak of his success from the mid-1970's, Thompson was recognised by his regional audience to have the biographical authority to substantiate both the content material of his performances and a realist narrative style based on an autobiographical form of performance characterisation. His real life biographical detail was exploited as a contributory factor to authenticate the identity of the character of the performance routines by him using his real name to refer to the character in performance; and developing all of the joking material of both routines from a first person narrative. This could not have been accomplished without a definite association being made by members of an audience which recognised Bobby Thompson and the 'Little Waster' as having a synonymous plausibility: Bobby Thompson, who actually was a Private in the Border Regiment during the Second World War, was the 'Little Waster' who had

been conscripted as 'Private Thompson'. In short, the public knowledge that Thompson's regional audience had of his off-stage private life history, provided a biographical factor which contributed significantly to the authentication of his performances.

The caricature rather than the character of the performance

Up until now the 'Little Waster' has been referred to as the character of Thompson's performance. The word 'character' has been used to indicate the fictitious identity of a stage persona, created by a performer within the humorous context of a performance, as distinct from the actual identity of a real person. The aim of a 'character act' performer is to use whatever means available to them to develop a character that is sufficiently plausible to stylistically authenticate the content material of their performances. With Thompson, however, significant considerations must be made regarding the use of the word 'character' to describe his performances. Because his real life biography has been put forward as an important contributory factor to the authentication of his 'Little Waster' and 'Private Thompson' routines, there is the implication that Thompson himself was the character of the routines. It has been mentioned that when Thompson spoke in performance about dole queues, debt collectors, sick-notes and sessional beer drinking, he gave himself authoritative control over the references by using a first person narrative in the style of personal and nostalgic reminiscence, while continually referring to himself (as the 'Little Waster') by his real name throughout. He never acknowledged the identity of the 'Little Waster' stage character by any other name. Given that his old age and publicly accredited personal experiences of dole queues, debt collectors, gambling and drink, were recognised by his regional audience to legitimate both the content material and the style of presentation, there is an implication that a lot of the character of Thompson is invested in maintaining the 'Little Waster' character of his performances. This is not accepted here. To explain why it is not accepted, linkage of macro- and micro-levels of analysis is required to demonstrate that the wider cultural context of Thompson's performances must be considered in order

to show the identity of Thompson's 'Little Waster' as a regional caricature rather than an individual character.

> To adapt Hamlet's advice to the players, the caricaturist should ... 'hold, as t'were, a distorting mirror up to nature'. A mirror in which we recognise, in more permanent form, the follies of our own and others' behaviour. Having perceived in an over talkative or over rapacious politician a large mouth the caricaturist then captures the essence of the man on paper.
>
> (Lambourne, 1983, p.5)

Following the work of Emile Cohl, Lambourne's definition of caricature 'to capture the essence of the man', relates equally to the 'narrativized visual exposition' of 'popular graphic humour' (Crafton, 1990, p.XXI), as well as the traditional form of art on paper. It is then a definition that applies to Thompson as he distorted his own personal physical and biographical identity into a comically 'narrativized' stage persona. Even with the insistence that caricature refers to 'the comic distortion of an *individual* man' (Lambourne, 1983, p.5), the perceptible characteristics of the 'Geordie' individual, upon which Thompson's caricatural distortion relied, was the amalgam of regional imagery that was recognisable to his audience. Thompson's authenticated performance representation of the 'Little Waster' character, is, therefore, put forward as a grossly overstated comic caricature of an image-typical Geordie stereotype.

Thompson's stage persona as a regional 'Geordie' caricature was predicated upon his ability to inflate the 'Little Waster' identity of his performances to an exaggerated point of being comic without being merely silly. Lambourne (1983) argues this is the basic definition of caricature, literally 'to load, to overload' (p.7). However, to do this requires a strain of plausibility from which to overload a comic representation of a person by exaggeration of characteristic traits. For Thompson, the stylistic realism of the autobiographical narrative form, which was based on a high level of authentication he was able to bring to that form using a variety of physical and biographical factors, affords this strain of plausibility. From this point Thompson was able to call into effect various other codes of signification that worked to extend the range of possibilities of

idiosyncratic interpretation of his joking references. This is because the references were able to draw on a wider North-East regional referent that his working men's club audiences could appreciate as a thread of plausibility to the caricatured working-class 'Geordie' identity of the 'Little Waster' stage persona. This is to say that Thompson's audience could easily engage with the reality of the performance on the grounds of shared knowledge.

> the moment of reception of a joke is an integral part of the joke process, that reference to 'the discourses of the social formation' as the source of the comprehensibility of jokes should not be taken as unproblematic. For those discourses are not spread evenly across a social formation, they have different impacts upon different sections of the population, difference which may or may not be isomorphic with traditional notions of stratification.
>
> (Palmer, 1987, p.138)

The substantive joking content of Thompson's work was based upon traditional notions of social class stratification appertaining specifically to the vagaries of material deprivation and a symptomatic social unsophistication deemed to be endemic to a working-class lifestyle. This is a joking discourse that has been traditionally exploited across the full range of comic performers from 'mainstream' Music Hall comedians like Max Miller, to the Oxbridge intellectuality of Monty Python in their 'Four Yorkshiremen' sketch. This is to say that the joking content of Thompson's act is both familiar to an audience in any region of the UK and is universal in its thematic appeal.[14] This provides a secure basis for Thompson to superimpose a regional particularity to his joking content, by using a range of stylistic ploys to give universal working-class themes a regional 'Geordie' flavour. For Thompson this was not difficult. First, the regional working men's club audiences' familiarity with the imagery attached to the 'Geordie' label provided an archetypal statement of working-classness that enabled a direct association to be made between his 'Little Waster' Geordie character act and universal working-class themes. Secondly, Thompson was able to stylistically control the joking content of his performances to project what was perceived to be a particular regional discourse by a 'Geordie comedian'. Both of these performative features will now be considered for their contribution to 'the

cult status' ('Times' obituary, 20 April 1988) of the comedian Bobby Thompson in the North-East of England.

Regional style

Palmer (1987) cites Cohen's thesis, 'that jokes create intimacy based on the supposition that all jokes mobilise shared knowledge' (p.138). To Palmer this means that jokes do not have to be explained, because if they do then the humour is essentially lost (p.138). Thompson's joking references stand at the furthest extreme from needing explanation. They were so supremely well articulated that his North-East regional working men's club audience accepted that they represented a sense of intimacy between Thompson and themselves - an intimacy based on the supposition of a shared knowledge of common everyday regional working-class experiences that underpinned the humour of his performances.[15] Thompson was able to increase the level of affinity (or intimacy) with his North-East audience, by skilfully combining the symbolism of his personal physical and biographical attributes with a range of performance techniques, in order to 'regionalise' universal working class joking material. For example, he would give a regional inflection to joking content by localising speech and placing events within specific regional geographical boundaries. Localising references geographically is common practice for stand-up performers.

> 'Look, if I'm doing a club in Yorkshire I'll make the same joke I'd use up here seem like it's theirs. . . . it's just a way of working the audience really. In Yorkshire I'd say, 'there were these two women talking, and one says to the other: 'I was wondering about having a baby'. The other lass says: 'Why, have you had a check up?' And the first one says: 'No, he was a Bradford lad'.
>
> (See Appendix 2, Note 12)

Having worked in working men's clubs across the North-East for more than fifty years, Thompson was highly knowledgeable of the area and this enabled him to localise references to the immediate vicinity of the particular club he was performing in. He knew what to say to each club audience to show that he knew about the same things they did and, correspondingly, that he was talking about

the things that they knew about. This communicated affinity facilitated a sense of security from which members of Thompson's audiences were able to relax and enjoy his performance, knowing that it was not going to challenge them with obscure joking material that they might not understand. To maximise the effectiveness of a securely positioned audience, Thompson continually reassured audiences throughout the course of his act with interjected references to the detail and foibles of the day-to-day workings of ostensibly their social club. This was to strengthen the affinity between audience and his performance on two levels. First, it reassuringly called upon the expertise of audience members as club members to understand the joking references being made in performance. Secondly, such references contained within them an inverse sense of security, in that members of a club audience could perceptibly appreciate an intimacy from being able to 'get' particular joking references that others without their particular knowledge would not be able to. Giddens (1984) recognises that the regionalisation of a 'locale' such as an institutionalised setting, can produce strong psychological and social resonance to 'enclose' some types of activities and 'disclose' others, which, in the case of Thompson, contributes to an explanation of the construction of intimacy with his North-East regional working men's club audiences.

Most importantly Thompson was able to signal his affinity with his North-Eastern audience by being able to speak the same language. His use of regional dialect, idiom and colloquialism was deliberately affected for the comic purpose of the performance. He would 'act up' the comic qualities of the Geordie dialect put forward by Hadaway (1992), by thickening his accent and exaggerating the linguistic peculiarities of the dialect. This worked to emphasise incongruencies of social class contained within the joking content, as the 'Little Waster' character of the performance would testify to his working-classness by speaking in a thick Geordie vernacular regardless of the 'posh' people around him. It also worked to help put his joking material into a localised frame for his regional audience by acting as the 'community shorthand' (Hadaway, 1992, p.85). But Thompson went beyond a normal everyday usage of the Geordie dialect and used

words and phrases associated with the Geordie 'language'(p.85) from a bygone generation. In so doing he reminded audiences of his old age and presented them with an invitation to nostalgia that further removed his joking references to hardship, dole and debt from the empirical reality of material deprivation and placed them securely into the ludicrous context of the performance; away from the potentially painful real life experiences of members of an audience. He would, for example, joke about regionally nostalgic artefacts such as 'clippy mats'[16] and would always talk about money in pre-decimal terms of 'shillings' and 'bobs' (as slang for shillings), and in rediculously small amounts by contemporary standards in order to give the impression of greater value in a time past. He would tell his audience how he'd wake up at night 'sweating like a bull' because he'd kept 7 shillin' from his battle-axe wife and he couldn't remember where he'd hidden it.

In conjunction with other external signs such as his age, his slight physical stature and his use of costume, Thompson's heavy North-East regional dialect language combines to form an impression of the 'Little Waster' as a victim of economic circumstance from some time past. This affords his audience a position of superiority which Hobbes, like Plato, argued is essential to the production of laughter.

> Laughter, Hobbes says, is 'nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly'. In other words laughter is that 'sudden glory' we feel on becoming aware of our own superiority to others or to ourselves in the past.
>
> (Boston, 1974, p.29)

While a lot of the humour of Thompson's performance comes from the reversal of expectations and incongruous intersection of discourses built around the identity of the wily 'Little Waster' character who comes out on top, it remains an identity that is perceived to be of an inferior status to the individual members of an audience. One aspect of the lower working-class work-shy 'Little Waster's'

victim of capitalism status, is that it qualifies Thompson's stage persona as a 'low' character to a working-class audience and, as mentioned earlier, many writers argue that most comedy is based upon what an audience perceives to be a 'low' character (Charney, 1978, p.51; Holland, 1982, p.17).

In short, Thompson was able to develop a perfectly complementary combination of performance techniques and external/physical signs that allowed him to strengthen his particular affinity with his regional working men's club audience, by the way they contributed to the authentication of the content material used in his performances. But the question remains, why should a North-East regional audience be so enamoured with the work of this performer? Given that the content material he used was universal in terms of its essential working-class discourse, the answer must lie in the way the material was accepted and appreciated by North-Eastern working men's club audiences. Indeed, audiences' acceptance of an intimacy of the universal joking material is evident in the fact that they never tired of hearing Thompson tell the same material; that the funniness of the material did not depreciate and that joking references and one-liners from the material are still used by members of the regional public today, more than a decade after his death. Hence, the question of Thompson's regional affection must be addressed along the lines of how an effective combination of external signs and performance techniques combined to produce a particularly successful performance with an audience based fundamentally in the working men's clubs of the North-East of England.

Regional imagery

One more significant factor adding to the comic success of Bobby Thompson is the manner in which the combination of external signs, stylistic performance techniques and joking content, produced a performance that could be regionally localised in terms of its audience perceived commensurability with a 'Geordie' imagery that is platitudinaly attached to the (working-class) people of the North-East of England. Here, the consideration of regional 'Geordie' imagery, as a

significant factor in an interplay of significant factors giving rise to an exceptionally high level of successful live performance humour by a performer in one region of the UK, refers directly to the signs, symbols and imagery associated with a regional 'Geordie' myth. This is to say that familiar themes attached to Geordie imagery are not accepted in any way as a culturalist statement on the everyday experiences of (working class) people's lived reality in the North-East of England.[17] The only reality accepted here refers to those familiar themes which are commonly associated with the Geordie image by the people living in the North-East who make up Thompson's audience. These themes include: unsophistication, community, chauvinism/ heightened masculinity vis a vis hard work/dole - hard play/heavy drinking (Colls and Lancaster (eds.), 1992; Milburn and Miller (eds.), 1988). Apart from their general familiarity to Thompson's regional audience, these themes are accredited with an existence traditionally sustainable in the North-East by their vicarious consideration by organisations such as regional media and Urban Development Corporations.[17] They are not accepted as a statement on lived reality, but rather a statement on the existence of a regional Geordie myth that Thompson was able to exploit within, and not beyond, the parameters of the ludicrous context of his live performance humour.

Following the work of Barthes (1973), myth is taken to refer to a conventionalised cultural context against which signs can be understood without recourse to a causally defined true reality. Barthes points out in his opening essay of Mythologies, 'The World of Wrestling', that there is an acceptance of the signs of pain, anger and distress as part of the signifying practice of the wrestling match, yet there is no question raised as to the reality of these signs. Indeed, Barthes states that people would not be surprised to learn that matches were fixed! Rather, it is the conventionalised cultural context of wrestling which is appreciated and understood in terms of its mythical signification. The working of the Geordie myth is put forward in terms of the signs of dole, debt, chauvinism, class etc., that are appreciated and understood by North-East working men's club audiences as part of the conventionalised context of

Thompson's stage performance as a comedian, which is accepted as being, 'independent of any truth function', to refer to,

> ... any real or fictional story, recurring theme or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a group by embodying its cultural ideals or by giving expression to deep, commonly felt emotions. In this way, to describe an element of social life as 'mythical' is to refer to the way that it is somehow *culturally distinctive* as both a meaningful and expressive element of the culture or subculture in question.
>
> (Chapman and Egger, in Davis and Walton eds., 1983, p.167)

And like Chapman and Egger, whose work here concurs with Levi-Strauss, the concern is to,

> ... clarify not so much what there is *in* myths as the function of myth in 'conferring a common significance or unconscious formulations'...
>
> (Ibid, p.168)

With regard to Thompson, the ludicrous context of the performance refers the external signs and the authenticated stylistic presentation of the content material to the myth order of signification of the North-East. Fiske and Hartley (1978) argue this is a 'third' order of signification and is the level at which the sign ceases to become an independent entity, as it enters the realm of intersubjectivity whereby signifiers work from the public nature of symbolism. This avoids the truth/falsity problematic in which subjective responses to image are expected to correspond to a reality from an individual cognitive and psychological process (p.46). Gerbner (cited in Fiske and Hartley) argues against this correspondence when he states clearly that the 'symbolic world is often very different from the 'real world'' (p.23). There is in Gerbner a recognition of the public nature of symbolism as a cultural truth in that the general response is one of an understanding of a meaning system, rather than searching for the reality to which it corresponds. An audience in the UK hearing the opening line, 'There were these two Irishmen...' is provided with an immediate signal that is generally understood in terms of a (symbolic) meaning system (Davies in Powell and Paton (eds.), 1988; and in Durrant and Miller (eds.), 1988). Zijderveld (1983) states it is the very nature of humour to require a precise understanding of such structures

of meaning, as the essence of humour is an ability to bend and 'play with meaning' (p.23). If the subjective responses to such imagery were individualistic in nature, DeFleur argues the implication would be that individuals would react in general to the message of the signifiers in the same way as they would react to the reality it portrays (cited in Fiske and Hartley, 1978). This would not be conducive to humour. For example, the symbolism of 'Irish' would be rejected for the individual cognition that Irish people are no more or less stupid than English, Scottish or Welsh people. From the symbolism that is characteristic of myth, the subjective responses that occur in individuals 'are not, paradoxically, individualistic in nature' (Fiske and Hartley, 1985, p.46), they are public in that they are shared by all members of a culture (or at least all members of an audience to successful live performance humour).

Fiske and Hartley make the point that intersubjectivity is 'culturally determined' and it is through this that cultural membership is expressed.

> The myths which operate as organizing structures within this area of cultural intersubjectivity cannot themselves be discrete and unorganized, for that would negate their prime function (which is to organize meaning): they are themselves organized into a coherence that we might call a *mythology* or an ideology.
>
> (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p.46)

In the North-East Thompson's exposition of Geordie mythology in his composite 'Little Waster' performance is put forward as a significant factor in developing an exceptionally highly intimate level of affinity between his stage persona and members of his regional audience. There is no suggestion that Thompson's performances correspond to a reality beyond the system of meaning that his audience understand is being exploited for the purpose of humour. Indeed, the (Geordie) symbolism being exploited by Thompson is 'culturally determined' as familiar and coherent within the public sphere of the imagery associated with the symbolism of working-class mythology. Hence, any attempt to refer to a correspondent reality beyond the humorous context of his performance would not be confined to a North-East regional specificity.

The consideration of the working of myth in relation to the performances of Bobby Thompson in the North-East of England, is to show how he was able to develop an affectation of regionally specific intimacy on the basis of a shared understanding of stylistically contextualised references with his audiences during a performance. There is no case being made for a pre-eminently strong North-Eastern regional identity existing outside of the humorous context of Thompson's performances that actually determines his audience's understanding of his work. The case being made is that a myth order of signification provided regional 'Geordie' images which were to act as a 'resource' for members of Thompson's audience to judge acceptable action towards others (Thompson as a performer) regardless of how accurately those images correspond to reality (Shotter, 1993, p.15). Thompson was judged as a comedian: as a performer who had the humorous licence to tap into this resource and exploit the images contained within it to develop a particularly successful stylistic presentation of acceptably nostalgic and comically sanitised joking material. This is to say that a correspondent empirical reality of material deprivation and the social ills it entails, as represented in violent, chauvinistic and misogynous references, may be disturbing to people hearing them outside of their containment as images within the ludicrous context of the performance. Thompson's audience, like any other 'simple audience', (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), knows how to judge their action towards what Culler calls the 'conventionalised indexes' of theatrical performance (cited in Bennett, Martin, Mercer and Woollacott (eds.), 1981). This is to say that the potential for a correspondent reality intervening to undermine a theatrical performance is raised only when the conventional expectations of an audience are broken. For Thompson, this could have happened if he made references that were not understood in terms of the resource of familiar images he was expected to perform as the 'Little Waster' character. Hence, his total adherence to the character, pattern, form, content and style of his performances to North-East regional working men's club audiences over the periods of the height of his successfulness as a comedian.

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Giddens, in his Theory of Structuration, establishes social practice as the outcome of the conception of the duality of structure. He proposes this embodies linkage of macro- and micro-levels of analysis in social research. Linkage is, therefore, a fundamental requirement of the theoretical location of this research, which is confirmed by Giddens's work on institutions. He points out that institutions are by definition structured social practices that have broad spatial and temporal extension - 'structured in the *longue duree* of time' (1981, p.164), while maintaining that the day-to-day cannot be separated from long-term history and long-term institutional development. He emphasises linkage further when he refers to institutionalised settings as a system which can 'reinforce memory-traces and reproduce relations between actors or collectivities, situated in time-space' (1981, p.170), while acknowledging the facilitative effects of the system for agency and interaction of social actors. Hence, this chapter uses the example of Thompson to demonstrate the centrality of linkage to the research, by showing how it allows for the (un)successfulness of live performance humour to be acknowledged as the complex product of the interaction of social actors in the particular social context of a venue setting at a particular time in a particular space.

The chapter uses the example of Thompson to show that macro-level analysis of the significance of historical, regional and cultural factors contributing to his success, does not require the North-East region of England to be established as a real determining historical materialist structure to explain (dialectically) the reproduction of social relationships informing a particular social practice. Instead, the example shows that a macro-level analysis of live performance humour as social practice is to establish an outer frame of reference to a performance, which, in the limiting case of Thompson, involved an analysis of images, signs, signals and symbolism attached to the myth order of signification of the North-East region of England. In the example macro-level analysis is given to demonstrate how linkage with micro-level analysis of Thompson's performances in a particular space at a particular time, allows for explanation to be made of his success. It is to explain it in terms of an institutionally positioned

'regionalised' audience interacting with the ludicrous context of a humorous performance, by being able to know images and symbols of a history of the North-East region which facilitates agency and interaction as essential to the successful production and reproduction of the example performer's live performance humour as social practice.

The chapter shows that in the context of this research interaction does not refer to the requisite application of the methodological individualism of a reductionist micro-level analysis of the meanings and intentions of social actors in a particular social setting. Rather it is used here to refer to the ways in which situated social actors interact with the complex systems of their wider social, economic, cultural (and regional) environments, as well as with each other in a particular venue setting social context. Consequently, an explanation of (un)successful live performance humour that is based on the identification of component factors, which infers that they can be controlled to produce a pattern to ensure that a live performance of humour succeeds, is not accepted here. Conversely, it is not accepted that failure is to be explained in terms of an irregularity occurring in such an instituted pattern and no example of failure has been given in the thesis to suggest this. This research is given to show that (un)successful live performance humour as social practice, is recognised as a complex system which has emergent properties that are more than the simple aggregate of individual physical/social and micro/macro-level component factors. It is to show that the interaction of component factors ensures that a combinational code of component factors, which can be put in place to guarantee the success of live performance humour, does not and can not exist. Hence, a combination of component factors that was shown in chapter six to be able to produce failure of live performance humour in the institutionalised venue setting of working men's clubs in the North-East of England, is shown in this chapter to be able to be effectively recursively (re)organised to produce (and reproduce) a heightened facilitative efficiency for Thompson's performances.

While the example of Thompson does indicate that a specific combination of component factors can exist to enhance the production of highly successful live performance humour, it is used essentially to demonstrate the complexity of live performance humour as social practice. Hence, the research recognises that Thompson (just like any other performer in the form) was not guaranteed performance success, and it is acknowledged that he did occasionally fail on stage, especially near the end of his life. Therefore, in order to use Thompson's work in working men's clubs in the North-East of England as an example to demonstrate the complexity of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice effectively, it is deemed necessary to utilise Giddens' concept of 'locus' and Lefebvre's concept of 'created space' to provide explanatory detail. These concepts are developed analytically and consistently within the situated theoretical location of this research to encapsulate and establish the essential unpredictability of live performance humour as social practice - in terms of the interaction of structural properties of long-term institutional social systems and the routine day-to-day knowledgeability of social actors in time-space. The concepts are considered to be eminently suited to being developed in this way here, as they are both originally theoretically located not to work with the dualism of structure and agency, but rather with linkage of practice and discourse: of symbolism and image with experience (Savage and Warde, 1993).

Locus refers to the subject as the knower of sense experience who can generate action on the basis of capability and knowledgeability in social settings. While capability refers to the actor being able to make decisions and choices and knowledgeability refers to what social actors know about their social situation and the conditions of their activity within it, Giddens proposes that much of the actor's knowledge is unconscious. This forms part of what he refers to as 'practical consciousness' which consists of the tacit knowledge that allows social actors to engage in social contexts without being able to give their actions direct discursive expression. Giddens acknowledges that the tacit and the explicit knowledge of subjects are interwoven into the texture of everyday social activity' (1981, p.164). Thus there is a recognition of the divergence of action and

consciousness, in that the reasons social actors attach to their actions may not correspond to the mutual knowledge tacitly employed by them and which they may not be able to articulate or be aware of in the production of social encounters.

Locus is, therefore, developed in this research as an analytical concept to work in conjunction with the concept of 'created space' to allow for the notion of a socially constructed sense experiencing subject to be utilised within the central proposition of linkage of macro- and micro-level analysis to an adequate and complete explanation of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice. The concepts provide for a consideration to be made of the practical consciousness of social actors, who are able to engage successfully in the liminal contextuality of time-space defined social encounters involved in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice. Thus, in the example of the extraordinary success of a particular performer in a particular venue setting in a particular region of the UK, locus is used to account for the agency and interaction of capable and knowledgeable subjects positioned in the day-to-day routinised and regionalised social practice of live performance humour in working men's clubs in the North-East of England. Lefebvre's concept of 'created space' emphasises the significance of the relationship between images of places and experience in spatial practices, where 'the social construction of space involves not just a purely discursive process whereby places are valued differently, but also the alterations in people's actual experience of places' (cited in Savage and Warde, 1993, p.129). Together they are used to acknowledge the interactive role of the ontologically secure subject as the knower of the reality of sense experience in relation to micro-level analysis relating to the co-presence of others in the social context of a venue setting, who has knowledge of the reality of the imagery, signs and symbolism attached to a macro-level analysis of North-East regional 'Geordie' mythology.

The concepts of 'locus' and 'created space' help establish both the liminality and the complexity of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

Thus the work of a MT1 'character act' performer in the North-East of England can serve as an illustrative example of extraordinary performance success which can not be successfully guaranteed. The example, therefore, logically illustrates failure in terms of the production of (un)successful live performance humour, by establishing complexity (rather than patterns) of interaction of social actors and component factors situated in the time and space of the particular social context of a particular venue setting. Hence, linkage of macro- and micro level analysis of the example performance in this concluding chapter demonstrates that the dynamics involved in the production of successful live performance humour are the dynamics involved in the production of unsuccessful live performance humour. This is why the thesis is titled as a study of (un)successful live performance humour

The thesis is put forward to establish the sociological significance of (un)successful live performance humour. The work of Bobby Thompson is given to conclude the research as an example of the complexity of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice in terms of the interaction of component factors and situated social actors as capable and knowledgeable subjects. The research concludes that an adequate and determinate sociological explanation of the production of (un)successful live performance humour is based on linkage of macro- and micro-levels of analysis of performance and non-performance component factors that form a social context for each live performance of humour. The explanation tells us that in the form of live performance humour, successful humorous performance is not determined by successful humorous performers.

Notes

Introduction

[1] The definition of a 'simple' audience is given by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, chapter two) and will be developed later in the thesis in chapter 5.

[2] Giddens regarded social actors as being capable insofar as they could have acted differently in any phase in a given sequence of conduct, even though they may normally act out of habit. Being knowledgeable refers to what social actors know about their social situation and the conditions of their activity within it.

[3] Working men's club audiences as talkative during performance. For reasons see chapter six re: arrangement of seating, drinking with friends etc. - component factors establish working men's clubs as social clubs with a social atmosphere.

[4] Experience of the Hyena club in Newcastle Upon Tyne see chapter four.

[5] At the time of writing up, a supplementary scheme specifically on performance was used to help me recover as much detail as possible on the particular performance(s) I had seen. This too was completed within 24 hours of a performance whenever possible.

[6] 300 hours refers to the approximate number of hours spent in venue settings for the purpose of doing the fieldwork for this research, and not the number of hours of performance. For example, three hours in a venue settings from 8.00 until 11.00pm could involve as little as twenty minutes of live performance humour time from a performer I had travelled specifically to the venue to see. Many more hours have been spent watching live performance humour prior to my postgraduate research.

[7] The main exceptions are working men's clubs and college bars. Each of these settings was found to have an audience that could be defined as a group from an identity of group membership that extended beyond the performative context of the venue setting. In working men's clubs audience members could also be defined as a group in terms of their status of club membership and locality. In college bars audience members could also be defined as a group in terms of their status of membership of a student body.

[8] These venue settings range from a highly active and bawdy context (see Cook, 1994) to a respectable passivity that is evident in the Jongleurs chain, with discipline being imposed through measures such as enforcing a ban on heckling, and the introduction of a sit down meal as part of the evenings entertainment package (see chapter two). Also see detail on Hyena Comedy Club given in chapter four.

[9] Similarly, because of the same basic restrictions of time, finance and distance, as well as a constantly changing performance personnel, it has not been possible for me to watch every single live performance of humour in the UK. However, the range of performances within each of the three type categories established in chapter two, and the actual number of performances that have been watched to provide data that is representative of the scope and diversity of performances in each type, is deemed to compensate fully for any failure to observe a particular performance.

[10] The high number of working men's clubs in that category is largely a result of the research undertaken for my MA.

Chapter One

[1] Taken from his performance on London Weekend Television's 'An Audience with Bob Monkhouse' January 1993.

[2] Lee Evans in a television interview with Morweena Banks, Channel Four, November 1996.

[3] See Fine and Haskell Speer (eds.) (1992) for detail on monologue as a storytelling performance of humour.

[4] A series of six 'Likely Stories' recorded for the BBC and screened in June 1994, gives a typical example of the work of John Sessions' live performance humour.

[5] See Neale and Krutnik (1990) for detail on the 'comic' as defined in more general terms of 'intentionality to generate laughter'.

[6] A compilation of review notices for Ennio Marchetto can be found in 'Edinburgh Festival Fringe' (1994), which is a programme handbook for the Edinburgh festival.

[7] In the first chapter of their book, Neale and Krutnik (1990) point out that a 'mode' of comedy differs form a 'form' because it is characterised by 'its own techniques and methods' (p.19).

[8] For a discussion of the historical development of this type of performance (the sketch) see Rutherford in Bratton (ed.) (1986).

Chapter Two

[1] For a discussion of the usage of the terms 'form' and 'genre' see Neale and Krutnik (1990) chapter one.

[2] Artistic status can be specified as 'conservative' or 'radical', following the work of Paton, in Powell and Paton (eds.) (1988).

[3] Oliver Double, paper presented to the 13th International Humor Conference, University of Aston, Birmingham, England, 31 July - 4 August 1995.

[4] For example mainstream type jokes that reinforce dominant cultural stereotypes see Cotterill in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.) (1996).

Chapter Three

[1] See Thorncroft (1993); Cook in Wareham (ed.) (1994); Wagg in Paton, Powell and Wagg (eds.) (1996); Dugdale (1999); Robins (2000) who identify 'circuit performers who have entered into television as the 'new mainstream'. This can also apply to live extreme type performers such as Jim Davidson who have substantially changed their performance to enter mainstream television as the host of BBC's early evening "Generation Game" programme.

[2] See for example the Bob Monkhouse 'Live' video, which shows him (an established MT1 performer on television), performing an extreme type of act. Also Jim Davidson's 'live' videos show him performing the extreme type of performances he shifted from in order to establish himself in television.

[3] See Spillius (1995) on the attendance of comedy clubs by what he refers to as the 'graduate classes'.

[4] See chapter two and chapter five for examples of Roy 'Chubby' Brown overstepping the bad taste limit in his performances.

Chapter Four

[1] For an indication of the way the term 'social situation' is being used in the thesis, see Flaherty (1990).

[2] See for example the development of venue settings in the comedy circuit as detailed in chapter two.

[3] The reference relates to an ET2M performer called Roy 'Chubby' Brown, who fills large theatre venue settings across the UK, and has released three best selling video recordings of his live performance work.

[4] Billy Connolly a MT3C performer was attacked on stage by a member of an audience during a performance in Brisbane, Australia. I have interview data referring to first hand accounts of two performers in working men's clubs in the North-East of England who have been physically assaulted directly as a result of their performances, when they were leaving the venue.

Chapter Five

[1] This point is supported by fieldwork data collected from interviews with members of working men's club audiences undertaken for my Master's degree.

[2] It is acknowledged that this research was undertaken more than 35 years ago and that comparable contemporaneous research may not produce the same findings. See Chapman and Gadfield (1976).

[3] See chapter four note 4.

[4] At the New Tyne Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne, the compere to a Newcastle Comedy Festival show in 1998, called Dave Johns, came on stage between the performances and urged people to go to the bar and get a few drinks down so that they would start heckling and give him something to work with.

[5] See reference to Kay Ward (a MT3E performer) in chapter six.

Chapter Six

[1] The figures quoted are for 1986. They are taken from Tremlett (1987), and show a decline in C.I.U. club membership from a high of over 12,000,000 in the 1960's. In an interview with a member of staff at the Durham branch office of the C.I.U., in April, 2000, the national figure was put at 3,000,000 members.

[2] The North-East has the highest concentration of directly affiliated C.I.U. clubs compared to any other region in the UK - Durham (274) Northumberland (143) and Cleveland (42). The Durham branch of the C.I.U. alone, has more clubs than South Wales (230) or the West Midlands (215) or Manchester (244). Figures taken from C.I.U. June, 1996 List of Clubs, the most recent published list available to the Durham branch office. The North-East also has approximately 500 clubs that are not directly affiliated to the C.I.U.

[3] In May 1919 club members from the Northumberland Branch of the C.I.U. agreed to set up a co-operative movement to produce and supply beer to their member clubs in order to circumvent the existing high price of beer. The result was the formation of the Northern Clubs Federation Brewery, based at Dunston, Newcastle upon Tyne, which produced its first brew in April, 1921.

[4] Brandon and District Social Club, Consett Victoria Social Club, Craghead Victoria Social Club, Medomsley Pretoria Club, Prudhoe Working Men's Social Club, Stanley Central Club, and Witton Gilbert Working Men's Club. The question that was asked was, 'what form of musical entertainment do you think is the best to attract custom into the concert room of working men's clubs on a week-end?'

[5] In April, 2000, both Agencies said they represented about 100 'music acts' working in working men's clubs. Fees for music acts ranged from £100 to £1,000 per booking, with £400 - £500 being common. West End Theatrical

Agency said they had 8 comedians on their books working in working men's clubs, and Beverley Entertainment Agency Ltd. had 12. The average fee for a 'club comedian' is between £250 and £300, with a 'top' fee being £350 and a 'low fee' being £200. Both Agencies agreed that the number of 'club comedians' on their books had fallen to approximately one-third of the high point number of comedians they represented in the 1960's and 70's, while the number of music acts had remained fairly constant in comparison.

[6] There are variations on the amount paid for annual subscriptions and the way they are paid. However the cost is small - usually about one pound. Some clubs require members to pay more, about five pounds, but remunerate members with a number of pint tokens that can be redeemed in the club. Belmont club in Durham uses this approach to yearly subs. Members pay £5.50 subscription and receive 5 pint tokens to exchange in the club.

[7] Prices do vary from club to club and some drinks compare less favourably to pub prices than others, yet the price of alcoholic drinks in clubs is generally lower than comparable drinks in public houses in the same vicinity. For example, two working men's clubs (Number One Central Social Club and Medomsley Pretoria Club) and two public houses (The Jolly Drovers and The Miners Arms in Medomsley) were chosen within a three mile radius in Consett, County Durham. Four drinks were chosen for price comparison on the 6 April 2001:

Venue	Drinks			
	John Smiths (beer)	Fosters (f) or Carling (c) (lager)	Optic whisky (blended Scotch)	Hennessy (brandy)
No. 1 Club*	£1.17	£1.19 (c)	£0.70	£1.02
Pretoria Club	£1.49	£1.54 (f)	£0.84	£1.22
Jolly Drovers	£1.64	£1.80 (b)	£1.30	£1.55
Miners Arms	£1.80	£1.95 (b)	£1.40	£1.50

* The Steward of Number One Club told me that the price of drinks in the club were set on a 40% profit margin

In addition to the price variation in drinks sold in both pubs and clubs, working men's clubs have special ties with the Frederation brewery to sell a range of products that are not available to pubs in the North-East. In terms of beers and largers they are approximately 5 -10p a pint cheaper than 'pub' beers sold in the same club.

8 Inevitable legal, social and club constitutional anomalies are arising with regard to women in working men's clubs. For example, women now hold positions on committee in some clubs, yet cannot attend C.I.U. Annual General Meetings (a right of committee members) because they do not hold associate membership status. To achieve this status requires a resolution to be passed at AGM. Women who are committee members cannot attend and therefore cannot vote. The men who attend continually vote against associate membership for women.

9 In a MORI report entitled: 'Public Attitudes Towards Clubs' - submitted to the C.I.U. in 1986 - it was found that 58% of members who went to their club more than once a week, took a personal interest the running of the club. 74% of those surveyed agreed that there was a good community feeling in clubs, and in the case of Union (C.I.U.) clubs, 26% of members had been members for 20 years or more (cited in Tremlett, 1987, pp.259-60).

10 Some clubs are developing some unusual forms of chauvinism, such as all male bingo sessions in a club in Ferry Hill, County Durham.

11 The price of booking a performer to appear in a club varies according to the status of a particular performer (see note 5). The amount of cover charge members will have to pay to enter a common room in a club to see a performer will depend on the size of the club, vis a vis the number of people

going into the concert room, and the amount of money it holds in an entertaiments budget to be able to reduce or remove the need for a cover charge to be made.

[12] While many clubs will make no concession to live performance with regard to the activity of a concert room bar, they will, however, cease bar activity for bingo. I spoke to a barman in a club in Durham who had been given a written warning from a committee member for making too much noise washing glasses while the bingo was on.

[13] There is an extremely rare exception to this rule in the working men's clubs in the North-East of England. From the mid-1970's until his death in 1988, a MT1 'character act' performer called Bobby Thompson was as close to being guaranteed to be successful in any club in the region, as is possible for any comedian in any venue setting category to be. The successfulness of this performer will be detailed in the concluding chapter.

[14] Researching comedians in working men's clubs for a Master's degree, I found comedians making a clear distinction between 'Funny stuff' and 'Clever stuff'. They were referring to an essential difference between what this thesis has put forward as mainstream and circuit type performances. This is to say that the comedians I interviewed were adamant that circuit type performances, in terms of both content and style, would not be successful in working men's clubs. They said they would be dismissed by concert room audiences as being 'clever but not funny'. Also see McGrath (1981).

Conclusion

1 The depreciation curve refers to the matrix of 'bisociation' identified by Koestler, where once familiar, the path of the joke does not produce the level of anxiety or surprise that humour and laughter are based upon. In common

joking practice a pre-emptive strike on the punchline of a joke is a usual sign of dissatisfaction or disappointment.

[2] This is evident in the success of the work of Peter Peverley of the Northern Stage Ensemble. He wrote and began to perform a one man show celebrating the life and work of Bobby Thompson in 1997. His show continues to play to sell out audiences in venue settings across the North-East today (April 2001).

[3] See Hadaway in Colls and Lancaster (eds.) (1992) on the comic richness of the Geordie dialect.

[4] The statistics are taken from Amos (1988). They do serve as a spur to acknowledge that Thompson was a successful performer aurally in non-visual media. Indeed his initial rise as a successful performer was through radio. This point is made to indicate that the visual aspects of Thompson's performances are highlighted as significant performance factors to, rather than a causal explanation of, his success. The visual aspect is emphasised given the direction of the research to study live performance humour as social practice - namely people attending venue settings as a 'live' audience to watch as well as listen to performances.

[5] See note 2 above. Text taken from the Newcastle Comedy Festival programme, November, 1994.

[6] There is an extensive list of professional comedians working regularly in the North-East who use this content material. For example, 'Little' Billy Fane, Walter Gee, Lambert and Ross, Jordie Miller, Alan Snell and 'The Dixielanders'.

[7] The (ET2M) performer Roy 'Chubby' Brown provides numerous examples of content references that have proven to be too offensive to be contained within the humorous context of his performance, despite having established a

reputation that lets audiences know what to expect. For examples, see chapters two and five.

[8] Although it is noted that Thompson performed two routines, wearing two different costumes, I have kept the word 'character' in the singular because he maintains the identity and characteristics of a single 'character' through both of the routines. The changes in costume are used to indicate 'special associations' by referring the content material to different periods in the life history of the character.

[9] Again, see Hadaway as in note 3 above.

[10] Statement made on the basis of research undertaken by myself for a Masters degree by thesis.

[11] The Co-operative Society would supply furniture on a fixed-term hire-purchase agreement and would simply repossess it when there was a default on the weekly repayments.

[12] All of the performers mentioned in note 6 claim a biographical authority to the 'times were hard' content material they use in their performances.

[13] In 1959 Thompson was awarded his own television show by the Tyne Tees Televisions company. It was called the 'Bobby Thompson Show' and the London based producer, Philip Jones, was commissioned to produce it. The show was to run for 16 weeks at a regular weekly half hour slot at 9.30 pm. The show was developed in a loose sit-com format with Thompson playing himself; aka the 'Little Waster'. After three weeks the show was dropped by the company as a flop. The common perception of the failure is directed at Thompson's, and his wife Phyllis's, heavy drinking and feckless inability to meet the disciplined demands required by the medium. (Thompson maintained it was due to Jones's complete inability to understand and

appreciate the absolute importance of regional dialect to the essence of his humour).

[14] In the mid-1980's Thompson played two nights at the Wimbledon theatre in London to sell out audiences and was highly successful. Shortly after he was booked to appear as a leading act at the London Palladium. Mysteriously, Thompson pulled out of the booking only a few days before the show, which resulted in the show being cancelled. No one knows why he did not play the London Palladium.

[15] Chapman (1976) concludes that empirical studies have provided support for, 'the notion that as intimacy of a social situation is increased so overt responsiveness to humour is enhanced'(p.180). He refers directly to one experiment on seating arrangements as a significant factor to establishing the intimacy of a social situation. He found that laughter was significantly greater in face-to-face eating conditions (179). As is highlighted in chapter six, the members of concert room audiences in working men's clubs, are often seated face-to-face and have to turn to see a performance). Thus the venue setting of the working men's club is recognised as being important to the level of intimacy for Thompson's performances, which adds to the findings put forward in chapter six showing the influence of the setting in the production of (un)successful live performance humour as social practice.

[16] Clippy mats were rugs made at home from scraps of old material - a process more akin to tapestry work rather than weaving. In years gone by they were common in the North-East for practical use and were made out of necessity by working class women. It is highly unlikely that members of Thompson's audiences would have clippy mats in their homes, or have to put them on their beds to keep them warm in winter, but they would know about them from oral history or visits to regional social history museums like Beamish in Co. Durham, where traditional clippy mat making skills are on display seven days a week during the summer months.

[17] This statement refers to the culturalist school which is encapsulated in the claim to an experientially based reality that is amenable to personal validation and documentation from an individual's lived reality. See Hoggart (1958) and Williams (1965).

[18] For detail on the spending of these corporations on advertising agencies to dispel negative 'Geordie' images of the North-East, such as Newcastle City Council's investment in the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, see Wilkinson in Healey *et al* (eds.).

Appendix 1

Mainstream

MT3E	MT2E	MT1	MT2C	MT3C
Kelly, Ned Ward, Kay	Laine, Ellie Ritchie, Bob Starr, Freddie	Abbot, Russ (e) Burns, George (g) Bygraves, Max (e) Caine, Marti (e) Carson, Frank (g) Carson, Johnny (g) Cavett, Dick (g) Conley, Brian (e) Cooper, Tommy (e) Corbett, Ronnie (g) Cricket, Jimmy (c) Dawson, Les (g) Dodd, Ken (g/e) Emery, Dick (e) Forsyth, Bruce (e) Fox, Alan (g) Large, Eddie (e) La Rue, Danny (e) Little, Sid (e) Miller, Max (g) Monkhouse, Bob (g) Norville, Duncan (g) O'Connor, Tom (g) Rawlins, Spike (g) Tarbuck, Jimmy (g) Thompson, Bobby (c) Walker, Roy (g)	Bremner, Rory Carrott, Jasper Elliott, Mike Everage, Dame Edna aka Humphreys , Barry Lipson, Simon McGowan, Alistair	Connolly, Billy Wood, Victoria

Circuit

CT3M	CT2M	CT1	CT2E	CT3E
Atkinson, Rowan Brand, Jo Dee, Jack Dennis, Hugh Downe, Bob Enfield, Harry Evans, Lee Green, Jeff Marceau, Marcel Marchetto, Ennio Morton, Richard Punt, Steve Shuttleworth, John The Fast Show	Elton, Ben McPhail, Donna McTavish, Vladimir Smith, Arthur Springsteen, Anvil Wright, Steven	Beard, Yogi Hegley, John Hughes, Sean Izzard, Eddie Milligan, Spike Normal, Henry Reeves, Vic Sessions, John	Amazing Jonathan Hardee, Malcolm Skinner, Frank	Eclair, Jenny Savage, Lily aka O'Grady, Paul

Extreme

ET3C	ET2C	ET1	ET2M	ET3M
Allen, Tony (ve) De La Tour, Andy (ve) Jim Rose Circus (vi) Lifto (v) Sayle, Alexi (ve) The Bastard Son of Tommy Cooper (vi)	MacReady, Eddy Mr Methane Starr, Steve	Skyner, Gary Steady, Eddy	Blower, Joey Brown, Roy 'Chubby'	Andrew 'Dice' Gray Manning, Bernard

(c) character
(e) entertainer
(g) gag
(ve) verbal
(vi) visual

Appendix 2

(Source data taken from the research for my Master's thesis, 1990)

1. Interviews conducted with these performers; refer to chapter six and the conclusion.

2. Interview with Bob Ritchie a MT2E performer.

3. From interviews with Durham Branch officials.*

4. Interview with Alan Fox, MT1 performer.

5. Interview with Bob Ritchie, MT2E performer.

6. Interview with Bob Ritchie, MT2E performer.

7. Interview with Mike Elliott, MT2C performer.

8. Interview with Bobby Pattinson, MT1 performer.

9. A claim made by the writer/performer and North-East regional cultural historian, Joe Ging during an interview with myself in 1988.

10. Taken from Thompson's LP record, released in 1978, titled: Bobby Thompson - The Little Waster, produced by David Wood c. D.W.E. Ltd., Rubber Records.

11. Interview with Alan Snell, a MT1 performer, who works extensively in the North-Ease of England. It is a comment that is often repeated by performers and members of Thompson's audiences alike.

12. Interview with Bobby Pattinson, a MT1 performer, who has worked extensively in different regions of the UK.

* Interviews undertaken for this thesis

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